

VOYAGES



Steve Wilson '86

Adventure, knowledge call us forth
the voyage must begin.
A universe unfolded waits
to let us seek within.

Unbonded, new, yet timeless, fixed
a challenge bids us there.
Anticipating what befalls
excitement tempers fear.

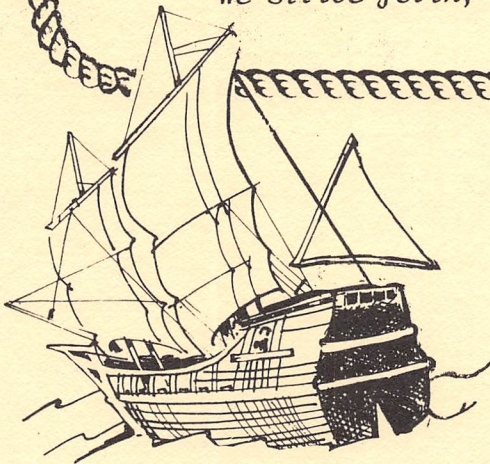
Thru new pursuits a loyal team
remains the steadfast core.
The past a bond with silvered hold
instills success secure.

Each duty carried out with skill.
Devotion, pride are fore.
Past and present seem to meld.
Here's unity that's lore.

Roused, the danger tempts us on
to new realities.
Our heightened senses give us strength
to conquer what will be.

Into this vast beguiling depth
the voyage stretches on.
What peril, prize, predestined fate?
We strive forth, quest begun.

Suzanne Elmore





VOYAGES

A STAR TREK - CLIPPERCON COMMITTEE ZINE



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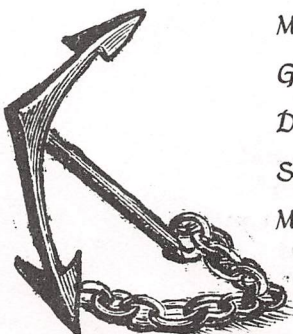
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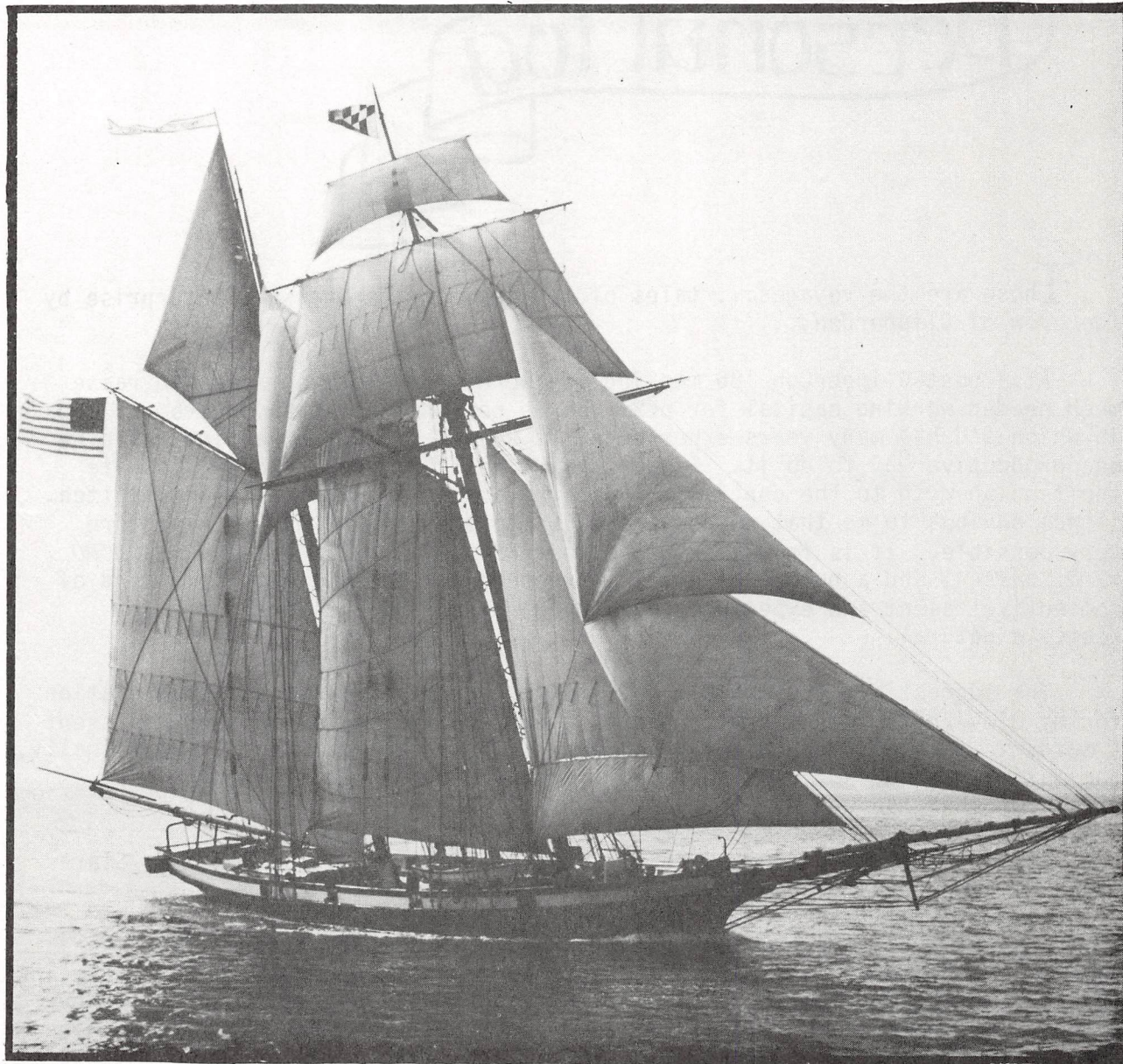
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Dedicated to the memory of
The Pride of Baltimore and to Her Final Crew



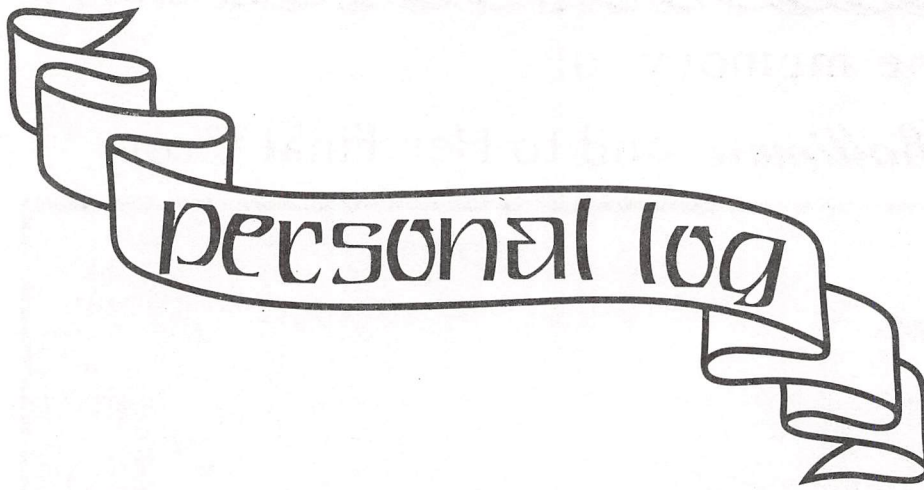
ALL CITIES HAVE DREAMS... OURS HAS MEN AND WOMEN COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO PURSUE THEM.....

IN MEMORY OF:

Captain Armin E. Elsaesser III
Barry Duckworth
Nina Schack
Vincent Lazaro

IN HONOR OF:

First Mate John 'Sugar' Flannagan
Joe McGeady
Susie Huesman
Scott Jeffrey
James Chesney
Dan Krachuck
Leslie McNish
Robert Foster



personal log

These are the voyages... tales of the crew of the Starship Enterprise by the crew of ClipperCon....

At a post-ClipperCon '86 meeting, we were brainstorming ideas to raise much needed working capital for next year's convention. Drawing from an area in which I'd had many years experience, it seemed to me that a zine would be one productive way to do it. I knew that zines can turn a profit, despite the fannish myth to the contrary. Glancing around the room at the committee, it was obvious to me that we had among us the means to make such a venture very possible. It is from this group that *CONTACT*, *VAULT OF TOMORROW*, *MIND MELD*, *GATEWAY* and a number of novels have been published. With this kind of collective talent and experience available, producing a ClipperCon zine seemed a natural.

The suggestion, for which I fully expected to receive a standing ovation for my cleverness, was met with groans, less-than-enthusiastic nods of assent (*well, we all had been cranking out zines for a very long time*), and finally, the maximum measure of confidence, placed on me by my peers, "Sounds okay. It's your idea, so why don't you do it."

"C'mon, guys, I need your help. It's a joint venture... It's for Star Trek, ClipperCon, America, Motherhood and Apple Pie... "

Eventually, I was able to procure a tacit agreement of sorts from my fellow committee members and zine aficionados, for contributions and assistance, *if* I'd handle the editor's job. Thus this 'honorable' position befell me by default, or another case of 'if-you-open-your-mouth-to-suggest-something,-you more-or-less-volunteer-to-do-it.'

That decided, I turned my attention to what kind of zine it should be. Of course, I *wanted* it to be Kirk and Spock, but this wasn't *CONTACT*. I felt the ClipperCon zine should reflect the more diverse interests of its committee and the variety of fen who attend the convention. I also wanted it to be representative of our city, which has become a major center of Star Trek activity.

In the past few years, with the demise of the old New York Conventions and the growth of Baltimore's downtown inner-harbor as a tourist attraction, focus has shifted to this town as the home of two annual Star Trek conventions, Shore Leave in July and ClipperCon in February. Although the two conventions are separate, both are proud to host the stars, guests, and fen who visit our city.

Baltimore's Harbor Place reflects the nautical theme so prevalent in the seaport city and ClipperCon, in particular, is dedicated to emphasizing that theme as well. References to 'sailing the stars' even as their ancestors 'sailed the seas' have re-occurred many times in Star Trek.

The ClipperCon zine, named *VOYAGES* for obvious reasons already stated, is produced solely by members of the Con Committee. Although it is a group effort, and every contributor gave of his/her self to make it possible, there were a few people who put in an extra measure and this editor would like to take the time to thank them publicly for their help. *Steve Wilson*, who besides his art and story contributions, was an invaluable editorial assistant. *Jan Davies*, who also helped with editing along with doing artwork and writing. Both Steve and Jan were always there with the encouragement when at times it seemed that *VOYAGES* would never be launched. Thanks for insisting that it would. *Sandy Zier*, despite an incredible personal schedule and putting out her own zine, took pity on Marion and helped out with the typing. Thanks, also, to *Nancy Kippax*, for proofing, corrections, and last-minute typing, and for all those who helped with the unexciting but necessary coolie labor.

The contents of *VOYAGES*, while still managing to emphasize the Kirk-Spock relationship (*I wonder why...*) should also appeal to any reader of Star Trek material. Steve Wilson's young Saavik story will delight all those fascinated by the newest addition to the Star Trek family. Jan Davies gives Scotty fans an interesting insight to his reactions after the re-fusion of Spock has been completed. And Martha Bonds gives us a science fiction solution to a present day reality. We're also presenting, in this issue, two works from a new member of the ClipperCon committee and new writer of fan fiction. Watch for Debbie Cummins in the future. I predict that you're going to see her name appearing in a lot of zines.

We'd like to hear your comments about the zine - our contributors are always anxious for feedback on their endeavors. Write, care of either Marion McChesney, who will be handling production and distribution of mail orders, or myself, with your creative and/or editorial commentary, at the addresses listed below.

Now, without any more preamble, I invite you to enjoy *VOYAGES*, a new Star Trek zine from the ClipperCon committee....

May the wind be at your back,

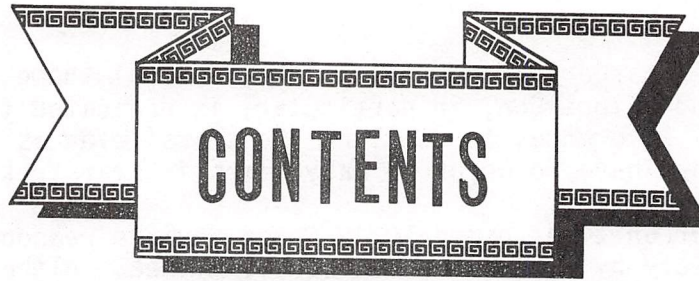
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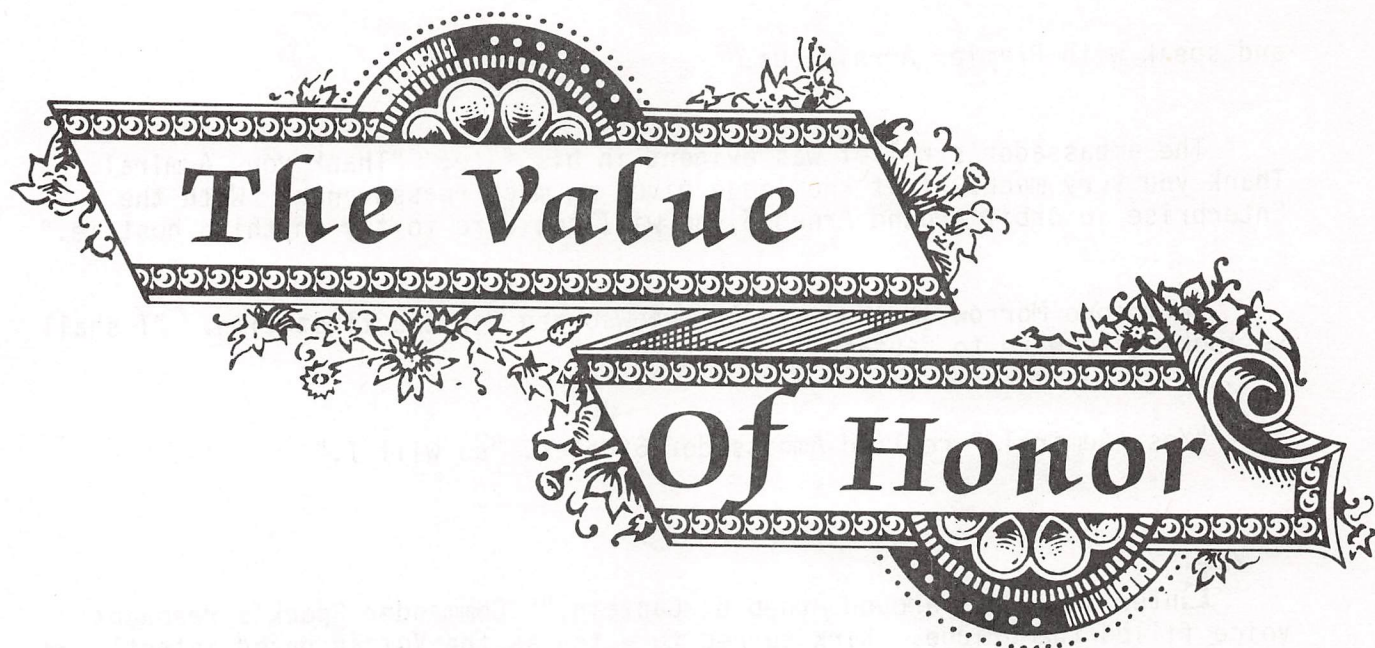
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The Value Of Honor

Deborah Cummins

The Federation had been expecting trouble from the Arnebian star system for over a year now, but when it finally came, it took them by surprise. Sidetes, the ambassador of Arneb 5, had urgently sent a message to Starfleet Command claiming that her aggressive neighbor, Arneb 6, was planning an immediate invasion of their planet. Commodore Morrow took the message personally and attempted to calm the frantic diplomat, reminding him of the three previous imminent attack warnings that Starfleet had received in the past fourteen months. This time, however, Sidetes was firmly convinced that he had read the signals correctly. The enemy was secretly mobilizing troops, ships were being withdrawn from transit runs for no apparent reason. Sidetes was certain that they were being refitted for use in the proposed invasion.

"Ambassador Sidetes," Commodore Morrow spoke, his words measured and precise, "we have been in contact with Premier Arrhidaeus and he has assured us that he has no belligerent intentions toward your planet."

"Of course he says that. What would you expect him to say? Did you expect him to admit to his plans?" Ambassador Sidetes' words were clipped and he continued to pace as he wrung his hands together in a state of high agitation. "Arneb 6 is far more advanced technologically than we are, Admiral. We could not hope to win this war alone. You must intercede for us, make certain that Premier Arrhidaeus understands that the Federation would take severe measures against him if he carries out his plans."

Morrow looked down at the fingers folded on the desk before him. "Ambassador, the Enterprise is on her way to you. I would request that you wait and see what Captain Kirk reports after he has had time to survey the situation

and speak with Premier Arrhidaeus."

The ambassador's relief was evident in his face. "Thank you, Admiral. Thank you very much. That knowledge gives me much reassurance. With the Enterprise in orbit around Arneb 6, he will not dare to try anything hostile."

Commodore Morrow smiled into the viewscreen for the first time. "I shall be looking forward to Captain Kirk's report."

"Yes, Admiral," replied Ambassador Sidetes, "so will I."

"E"ntering orbit around Arneb 6, Captain." Commander Spock's resonant voice filled the bridge. Kirk turned to watch as the Vulcan gazed intently at the viewscreen. He was not unaware of the weariness in Spock's voice.

He's tired too, Kirk thought to himself. When Spock began to show the strain of an extended tour of duty, Kirk knew how much below top efficiency the Human crewmembers must be. Due to unforeseen delays in the repair of the Exeter's engines, the Enterprise had been patrolling this quadrant alone for over eight months now. They had been allowed limited shore leaves on various planets during that time, but not the long relaxation that they all needed. Commodore Morrow had assured Kirk that this mission would be a brief one, intended primarily to calm the frayed nerves of Arneb 5's ambassador. Arneb 6 had shown no overt signs of hostility toward her weaker neighbor and there was no reason to think that Ambassador Sidetes' worries were anything more than a paranoid overreaction.

"Lieutenant Uhura, open a channel to Premier Arrhidaeus."

"Aye, aye, sir."

A moment later, the smiling face of Arneb 6's ruler appeared on the screen. Kirk appraised the image before him. A strong face, despite the finery, a man who is used to getting what he wants.

"Captain Kirk." The voice was congenial. "My apologies for your unnecessary diversion here. Ambassador Sidetes is an excitable man, prone to hysteria."

"Premier," Kirk replied, "as you know, Starfleet Command is bound by treaty to investigate a charge of this sort made by a Federation member. As another member of the Federation, Arneb 6 is obliged to grant us the opportunity to investigate the allegations."

"Yes, yes." Premier Arrhidaeus waved a jeweled hand before the viewscreen. "I understand, Captain. Please beam down and investigate. I will not hinder you in any way."

He's agreeable. Too agreeable.

"I will send you the coordinates to bring you directly to Belas' central square. I will be looking forward to meeting you, Captain." He smiled and the screen went dark.

Kirk sat for a moment in silence.

"Captain?" Uhura's voice broke into his thoughts. "I am receiving a message from Starfleet Command."

"Put it on visual, Lieutenant."

Morrow's face replaced the image of Arrhidaeus, which seemed until now to have lingered like a ghostly half-image on the viewscreen. "Captain," he began without preamble, "Ambassador Sidetes has been inquiring rather insistently about the progress of your investigation. I have informed him that the Enterprise has only just arrived and that you will conduct a thorough search. However, the Federation will have to act as mediator in case of trouble, whether it be military or diplomatic mediation. We have received intelligence reports indicating that Premier Arrhidaeus has used every method at his disposal to stir up hostility toward Arneb 6 among his people. Ambassador Sidetes' concerns are not without some foundation in fact. If you find no evidence of mobilization, Premier Arrhidaeus will undoubtedly use the opportunity to further exacerbate this animosity. I shall be relying on your diplomatic expertise to see that any damage to relations between the Arnebian planets with relation toward each other or the Federation be kept to a minimum."

Kirk found himself smiling at Morrow's method of complimenting him and then using that compliment to stick him with the assignment. "Thank you, Commodore. I'll keep that in mind."

"Good luck. Report to me on your progress. Morrow out."

Kirk watched the screen go dark, then turned to the communications console. "Lieutenant Uhura, have Doctor McCoy and a security detail report to the transporter room in ten minutes." He turned to the science station. "Mr. Spock, will you beam down with us? Hopefully, we will be able to straighten this mess out quickly and get down to the serious business of a long shore leave." He turned and walked to the turbolift. Spock, as he had expected, made no reply.

Eight hours of investigations and interviews had failed to turn up any evidence of military mobilization. The city was crowded, but Arrhidaeus had explained to Kirk's satisfaction that this was due to the annual harvest festival, held in Balas for nearly a thousand years.

"A barbaric custom," Arrhidaeus smiled. "Vestiges of a primitive religion, but it serves its purpose and the people derive much pleasure from it."

Kirk signaled the ship that he was ready to beam up. He did not like Arrhidaeus and would be glad to leave this planet.

"Captain." Arrhidaeus put his hand softly on Kirk's arm and felt him flinch under the touch. "Captain, the Arnebians respect authority. They would be most displeased if such a high authority figure as yourself were to reject their offer of hospitality."

From the tone of his voice, Kirk could tell that Arrhidaeus broke in. "Please do not bring any more of your personnel down, just you and your First Officer." He leaned closer to Kirk and whispered conspiratorily. "You may not have been aware of it, Captain, but my people know the reason for Starfleet's presence here and they are somewhat agitated about it. They feel that you suspect us of duplicity. The presence of Starfleet personnel during the celebrations here may exacerbate their anger. We are, after all, a peaceful people, as you have found out. We do not like to be wrongly accused."

Kirk moved away from him and signalled the transporter room. He didn't like being manipulated like this and would be glad to return to the Enterprise until Starfleet diplomacy forced their return.

"Very well, Premier. We will return in two hours. You may inform your people that the Federation is anxious to please them."

Arrhidaeus smiled at his words. The lights of the scrambled energy beams reflecting off the premier's teeth was the last thing Kirk saw as the planet dissolved around him.

Two hours and thirty minutes later, Captain James Kirk stood kicking his foot restlessly across the rich tapestry pattern of the rug at his feet. The sounds of voices filtered through the walls and Kirk glanced at Spock, staring intently out of the window that faced the plaza below. Arrhidaeus had met them when they had first beamed down but, mumbling apologies, had quickly escorted them to the antechamber where they now waited and, explaining that a problem had arisen and that he would return momentarily, had departed.

"I wonder what is going on."

Spock continued to peer out of the window.

Kirk sighed and fixed his friend with an affectionate look. "Well, at least having you here gives me someone to talk to."

Spock abruptly turned away from the window to face him. Kirk noted his preoccupation and moved to stand by his side.

"What is it, Spock? Is something troubling you?"

"Captain, I am concerned about Premier Arrhidaeus' insistence that only the two of us beam down. Our crewmembers would remain inconspicuous. It seems illogical for him to object to their presence unless he were trying to isolate us from the Enterprise."

"I don't like it very much either, but Arrhidaeus seemed eager to exploit any ruffling of native feathers, whether inadvertant or not. Considering the sensitivity of the Arnebians to our presence, perhaps it's for the best that no more of our people come down. He explained the peoples' reaction to the investigations, and Commodore Morrow did indicate that there was animosity toward the Federation over it."

"Captain, I have seen only minor examples of hostility from the natives. I do not believe that was the reason for the premier's request." Spock paused for a moment. "I ran a thorough investigation of this planet prior to our initial beam down. There are extensive subterranean chambers below the city that would prove impervious to sensor probe."

"They've already been checked out, Spock."

"The structures are very large. Our investigative teams were only able to explore a small percentage of them. And there are many others, also, outside of the city." The dark eyes were clearly troubled.

"What are you suggesting, Spock, that we're in some sort of danger here?"

"No, sir. I have no logical reason to think so." He looked over and Kirk could see the uncertainty in his eyes. "Captain..." Spock shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. "I know that this is highly illogical, but I have a ... sense of foreboding. I cannot articulate what it is... a... "

"... a feeling something is wrong?"

Spock looked distinctly uneasy at the suggestion. For a moment, neither of them spoke. "Yes, Captain," he said at last.

"A premonition? There are scientific bases for premonitions, Spock. You know that." Kirk reached for his communicator.

"Captain, what are you doing?"

"I think you should return to the ship."

Spock fixed his captain with a piercing stare.

"I request that you do not remove me from this assignment because I admitted to you that I had a feeling." He looked affronted, as if Kirk were betraying him for his admission."

Kirk looked up at him, his gaze softening. Slowly, he put his communicator away.

"Very well, Mr. Spock. However, I want you to tell me if you have any more of these 'feelings'. If anything happened to you, it would ruin my entire day."

Spock raised an eyebrow at this. "Captain, I never stated that this 'feeling' applied to me personally." He looked around at their surroundings. "Perhaps it is simply this place. I shall be glad to leave here."

"Yes, Mr. Spock, so...."

Arrhidaeus burst into the room. "My apologies, Captain, Commander." He looked angry. "We have a problem with the feast. I had a spectacular main course planned. It's been in preparation for months." Arrhidaeus paced across the floor. He stopped and smiled at the puzzled men standing before him. "A new cook, trying too hard to please, I suppose. The food has been ruined. My kitchens are in an uproar, everyone trying to come up with suitable replacements. The quality will be far inferior of course, but with enough wine the guests may not notice. Perhaps," he grinned wickedly, "we should eat the cook."

Spock paled at the crude joke, if indeed joke it was. There were many levels to this man and the thought of spending any additional time here did not please him.

Arrhidaeus lay a hand across Kirk's arm. "Please stay as our guests while we prepare alternative foods. My cooks have assured me that it will not take too long. The market is filled with people from the far corners of my planet. Wander about the plaza. The time will pass quickly, I assure you."

Kirk turned to Spock, who nodded imperceptively. The Vulcan, he knew, always enjoyed the opportunity to observe.

The market was crowded with people. Arrhidaeus had promised his people a spectacular festival this year and a sense of expectation filled the air. The babble of many languages, the colorful costumes were indeed interesting, but the constant jostling made Spock distinctly uncomfortable. He could see that Kirk was attempting to shield him from these physical contacts, placing himself between Spock and the others, clearing a path for him to follow through the crowd. The effort was largely wasted, however, as Spock was assaulted by discordant sensory perceptions with every touch.

Suddenly, the aimless babbling was cut through by a piercing series of shrieks. The cries seemed far away and the crowd began to move en masse toward the sound. Spock and Kirk pushed through the slow-moving mass and, as they moved, the cries became louder. Spock was the first to see the smoke, billowing up between the buildings, its acrid smell beginning to fill the air. People began to run toward them, gesturing frantically at the fire, crying for help. Kirk and Spock broke into a run.

The building appeared to be an abandoned derelict. As the crowd gathered near its entrance, a disheveled man dashed from the door. In his haste to escape the flames, he appeared not to see Kirk and they collided head-on, crashing to the ground in a tangle of limbs. Kirk felt his ankle twist in an unnatural angle as a finger of pain shot up his leg. The man quickly extricated himself, mumbling something incomprehensible and vanished into the crowd. Spock helped Kirk to his feet and the pain in his ankle was momentarily forgotten as they watched the flames dance from the windows above their heads. Suddenly, an old man, hobbling on one leg near the building's entrance, began to gesture frantically, repeating the same phrase over and over again. A native ran up to them, breathless.

"He says that his grandson is inside," he translated. "He's a vagrant, his family lived in there. They all made it out, except for the child."

Spock turned to the captain. "I will go," he said simply.

Kirk leaned forward, ignoring the throbbing ankle and grabbed for Spock's arm. "The building is nearly engulfed in flames. You'll never make it out."

Spock hesitated. Then a piercing wail cut through the roar of the fire. A high-pitched cry, filled with pain and terror, the cry of a child. Kirk and Spock reacted to the sound instantly, then before Kirk was able to stop him, Spock had disappeared within the flaming building. Hobbling toward the door, Kirk could hear the child's terrified crying from deep within the building. He thought briefly of following Spock inside but realized that he would be more of a hindrance to him. The flames grew hotter. The child's cry had stopped.



Suddenly, a loud groaning sound seemed to come from everywhere at once.

"Spock!" He screamed the name, his voice drowned out by the roar of the fire. Then, as if in slow motion, the entire building seemed to collapse from within, the air filled with the sound of splintering wood and breaking glass. Sparks and cinders flew everywhere and the nearby spectators fled for cover. The impact as the top floors hit the ground threw Kirk backward. Momentarily dazed and blinded by the ash, he struggled to see, to stand. Someone came to take his arm and for a single irrational instant, he thought that it was Spock. As he stood and fought to clear his eyes, he became aware of the deathly quiet that permeated the area in sharp contrast to the deafening tumult of the past minute. He opened his eyes and the sight that greeted him would be one that would burn in his memory for as long as he lived. Even as it had blazed, the skeleton of the building had a shape, a structure. Now, all that was left was a huge pile of smoking debris. For a second, his mind was unable to comprehend what had happened. He staggered forward toward the ruin. 'The Enterprise, I need help,' he thought, his mind clearing. 'Out of range for another hour.' He pulled out his communicator with trembling hands and opened a channel. Nothing. No help from that source for another hour. He could feel the adrenalin beginning to counteract the effects of the shock; and he reached out to grab the arm of the man who had helped him.

"There are people in there!" he shouted. "Help me!"

Suddenly the full horror of who was in the ruins hit him and he felt himself running to the building, frantically pulling at the bricks and beams, trying desperately to move them away. The stone was hot and burned his hands, but still he did not stop. In the back of his mind, he knew that it was useless, but that thought only served to fuel his frantic efforts.

"Help me!" he shouted to the crowd standing silently before him. For a moment, no one moved. Then someone stepped up to him, putting a compassionate but firm hand on his shoulder, trying to pull him away.

Kirk jerked himself backward. "Leave me alone," he hissed. "I have to find him, get him out. Spock...." The name came out as a strangled sob and he beat his fists against the stones. The Arnebian began again to pull him away. This time he did not resist.

Starfleet personnel swarmed over the entire area. Men and women with various types of equipment circled around the building amid shouts of directions and warnings as the crumpled debris was slowly lifted off what remained of the building's foundations. Doctor M'Benga, having relieved McCoy, had searched fruitlessly for any life readings and now slowly reset his tricorder. He turned his head toward the nearby building that McCoy had just entered. Kirk had retreated within it a short time before and McCoy, after making several hurried tricorder readings, had followed him, handing M'Benga the tricorder and telling him in hushed tones of his results. Negative. No life readings.

Watching the doctor slowly walk into the building, M'Benga shook his head sadly. It had finally happened. He wondered if Captain Kirk truly realized how much he had depended on his Vulcan First Officer. M'Benga and McCoy had worried for years about how the loss of Spock would affect him. They had hoped that they would never have to deal with the situation.

The structure was another apartment building, not a total derelict, but well on its downhill way. Kirk did not pay attention to rundown surroundings. He was grateful to find somewhere to retreat to, a dim, cool room that wasn't permeated by the smell of smoke.

He sat himself before the desk, not noticing or caring where it came from, or who owned it. The paint was chipped along its surface, and it rocked on uneven legs when he lay his arms across it. Security personnel, assigned to investigate the accident, formed a circle around him, listening without comment as he tonelessly reported what had occurred during the past seventy minutes. Relating his many hailings of the ship and reported attempts to remove some of the rubble as the fire slowly burned itself out, he seemed to McCoy withdrawn, shattered by the enormous blow he had received.

He stopped speaking and looked up at Lieutenant Erickson, head of the investigative team. "Do you have any information to report as yet, Lieutenant?"

"We are conducting a thorough investigation, as you ordered, Sir. The only facts we have come up with so far concern the long delay of the Arnebian fire control detail. The station is only five minutes from here, and yet it apparently took them twenty minutes to reach the scene. That is very...."

Suddenly an urgent call for Doctor McCoy from someone outside. Kirk's head jerked up and for one second, he thought that Spock had been found alive. McCoy was already out the door and Kirk nearly stumbled in his attempt to follow. A knot of Starfleet personnel clustered around one area of the ruins. McCoy, several feet ahead of Kirk, reached them first. He heard Kirk's steps behind him and turned to push him away.

"Jim, no. Don't look." His voice was firm, and he showed surprising strength as he held Kirk away. The hazel eyes looked pleadingly into his own. There was such naked dread in them that McCoy had to look away.

"He's badly burned, Jim." His voice was soft. He couldn't really believe that he was talking about Spock.

Kirk began to tremble in McCoy's arms. "You don't know it's him. It could be someone else," he pleaded.

M'Benga approached them quietly from behind. "Sir," he whispered softly to McCoy, handing him the tricorder. McCoy glanced at the information it presented and paled visibly. Kirk, watching his face, tightened his grip on the doctor's arm. McCoy motioned M'Benga away and looked Kirk in the face, his expression filled with compassion and sorrow.

"Tricorder readings show the body to be Vulcan." He paused for a moment. "Jim...I'm so sorry. Oh God, I'm so sorry."

Kirk's legs felt weak and for a moment, McCoy thought that he would fall. Then, he released his hold on McCoy's arm and began to walk unsteadily toward the ruins. McCoy grabbed him from behind.

"No, Jim, please. Come back to the ship with me. There's nothing more you can do down here."

James Kirk looked at him for a moment. "I want to see him, Bones." The voice was wavering.

"He's unrecognizable, Jim." He could see the pain in Kirk's eyes at the words, but continued, trying to shield his friend from the horrifying reality. "He wouldn't want you to remember him that way. Please, Jim."

The shoulders in his hands began to sag. Quickly, McCoy flipped open his communicator and opened a channel to the ship.

The Starship Enterprise continued her leisurely revolution of Arneb 6. Except for the deathly silence on board, everything seemed normal. Personnel continued to perform their duties efficiently, bridge crew were all at their posts, all but two. No one spoke on the bridge. After a time, Lieutenant Uhura silently got up from her seat and walked over to the library-science console. Quietly, she lowered herself into the chair and ran her delicate fingers over the controls. She could feel her resistance breaking down, but was unable to move from the station. His presence was still so strong, it was almost tangible. The tears would come now and in a strange way, she welcomed them. The tension in her chest as she fought for control during the past few hours had been nearly unbearable. 'Crying on the bridge,' she thought wryly. Mr. Spock would not approve and the thought made her smile between the muffled sobs. She felt Sulu's presence as he rose from his chair and came to stand behind her. His hand rested gently on her shoulder but she did not look up.

'The whole ship senses it,' thought McCoy. 'I was afraid of something like this, but now that it's come, it isn't as I expected. Everything feels different. Could one person have affected everything, even the feel of the

ship, this much?' Even Spock couldn't do that. The ship was so quiet, as if, in deference to the silent Vulcan, everyone was grieving in a withdrawn, isolated way. McCoy's thoughts turned to Kirk. They had transported up to the ship in total silence. Kirk's face was pale, his lips pressed together in a fine line. He had quickly left the transporter room, intending to go to the bridge, but McCoy, catching up with his rapid steps in the corridor, had prevailed upon him to retreat to his quarters for a period of decompression. It would cause him too much pain to be on the bridge now, having reminders of Spock everywhere. He was not needed there at this time and McCoy couldn't bear the thought of him inflicting the additional sorrow on himself unnecessarily. He prayed that Kirk wouldn't contest his request, knowing that he didn't have the heart to make it a medical order. But, after meeting his eyes for a moment, Kirk had nodded silently and turned to walk slowly down the hall toward the privacy of his own room.

McCoy had watched him go, wondering if he should be with him and share his sorrow. Kirk had not asked him along and so he stood forlornly, one solitary figure in the quiet of the empty hallway, watching another solitary figure move away from him. Finally, when Kirk had turned down another corridor and disappeared from view, he made his way slowly back to sickbay.

The medical environment did not provide the comfort it always had in the past and he found himself fidgeting: wandering around, reading reports without comprehension, shifting supplies from one spot to another, his thoughts on the sorrow that seemed to surround the captain like an aura.

Finally, after reading a survey on the innoculative potential of a new serum without a single word registering on his mind, he moved over to the intercom and signalled Kirk's quarters.

The first summons went unanswered and he found himself hoping that Kirk was asleep, although he knew that such a thing was impossible. The second buzzer elicited no response and when the third went unanswered, the thought laced through his mind like a flash of insight and he knew without question where Kirk was.

Slowly, he rose to his feet and left the sickbay, wondering all the while what he would say when he found him.

The quarters were dark except for the glow from the firepot flame. It was hot, always seemed so hot. James Kirk walked over to the bed and sat down, fingering the embroidered blanket draped neatly across it. Vulcan designs.

This blanket has been lying here for years and I never knew if it was Vulcan. Maybe Amanda made it for him. I never asked. The bed feels hard. Such a thin body on such a hard bed. Did he sleep like this deliberately to

deny himself the comfort of a soft mattress or did he prefer it this way? I never asked him that either.

Suddenly, all the things that he never asked, all the things he never said, rose up to fill his consciousness with such a sense of loss that he felt he would suffocate. A long groan rose from deep within his chest and in one convulsive gesture, he grabbed at the blanket and pulled it to his face. 'Spock, oh my God, Spock. You were my strength, my anchor.' He buried his face in the blanket. As his grief consumed him, he was unaware of the third presence in the room until the hand gently came to rest on his shoulder. He knew without looking who it was. McCoy, who could not bear suffering, had come trying to ease his, but there would be no end to this pain. He turned toward the doctor and felt his head being gently pulled down to rest on the other's shoulder. They sat this way for many hours, united by their grief and the presence of the one who was lost.

It was 0800 hours and Captain James T. Kirk stepped onto the bridge of the Enterprise. He noticed that all eyes turned to him as he walked stiffly to his command chair. His hand trembled slightly as he lay it on the command console.

"Status, Mr. Sulu."

"All normal, Sir." Sulu's voice was subdued. "There is no sign of any increased traffic on the surface. There are a large number of Arnebian vessels in orbit around the planet, Sir, but we have received satisfactory explanations for all of them." When Kirk did not respond, Sulu continued to report, "Seventeen vessels now in orbit, Sir. The Arnebians have things well in hand. Their technological organization is able to handle all of these vessels at one time. We're keeping track of them all, of course, but there appears to be no danger of collision."

"Yes," Kirk answered dully, "the Arnebians are very organized."

Where was the fire control detail? The question Lieutenant Ericksen had posed to him yesterday came back to him suddenly. The Arnebians can keep seventeen vessels in simultaneous orbit around their planet but can't get a fire control detail to a fire in less than twenty minutes?

"Captain, I have a message coming in from Starfleet Command."

Kirk turned to Uhura slowly, his mind still on the question. "Put it on visual, Lieutenant."

The grim face of Commodore Morrow appeared on the viewscreen. "Jim." He hesitated. "Jim, I have been informed of your tragic loss. I want to express to you and all the crew of the Enterprise my deepest condolences."

Captain Kirk gazed back at the viewscreen. The muscles of his jaw tensed. "Thank you, Sir."

"The Vulcan embassy and Ambassador Sarek have been informed. The Ambassador has requested a full report." Commodore Morrow paused uncharacteristically, looking down at the hands folded before him. "Jim, if there were any way to relieve you for a while, please be assured that I would do so. I realize how close you and Commander Spock were." The words trailed off. The bridge was in total silence.

"Is that all, Sir?"

"Yes, Captain. Please keep me informed. Morrow out."

As the image on the viewscreen faded, Captain Kirk rose slowly from his command chair and headed for the turbolift.

"I'll be in sickbay," he spoke over his shoulder to Uhura as he walked off the bridge. He had never once looked over at the science station.

McCoy's voice reached him from the corridor. Kirk silently entered sickbay, quickening his pace in the last few steps as if to flee from the scrutiny of his shipmates. As the doors closed behind him, he leaned back against them and closed his eyes. The scene on the bridge had taken more out of him than he had realized. It had all seemed like a dream, his voice had sounded far away, he couldn't feel the floor beneath his feet. It had taken every bit of control he possessed to get through it and he thought of Spock, as he had so many times already in this day only a few hours old. 'He has changed my life in so many ways, more than I will probably ever really understand.'

The voice in the other room penetrated his thoughts. "...multiple contusions and broken bones. Severe trauma to the head and pelvic region. Death was caused by excessive blood loss due to the severing of the femoral arteries, both legs being partially severed just above the knees."

Kirk stood transfixed by the image the words were creating in his mind. McCoy stopped speaking for a moment and folded his hands before him. He sat unmoving for a moment, then slowly steepled his fingers, looking at his hands, his eyes focused on something far away. Kirk, seeing the gesture, felt a groan rise from deep within his chest. He pushed his head against the wall behind him and fought back the tide of grief which threatened suddenly to overwhelm him. McCoy, hearing the sound, rose and quickly came to stand beside him.

"Jim, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were here. You shouldn't have heard that."

"He didn't burn to death." Kirk's voice sounded more like a gasp. "I was afraid he had burned to death."

"No." McCoy's voice was soothing. "He was almost certainly unconscious from the other injuries. I doubt...."

"Almost? You mean he may have been conscious in there?" 'Did he call for me? Oh, Spock,' he wondered, 'did you call my name?'

"There is no way to tell, Captain. Please, don't think about this."

"I want to see him, Bones." He began to move toward the autopsy room. McCoy grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"Jim, we've already been through this."

"I want to see him, Bones. I need to see him one more time."

"Please, don't fight me on this." McCoy hesitated. "You won't recognize him. Dammit, Jim, you won't even recognize him."

The anguish in his voice forced Kirk to stop and he realized with a start that he had been so wrapped up in his own grief that he had never given any thought to McCoy's. He saw the fresh lines around the eyes, wondering how McCoy had been able to find the strength to go into that autopsy room and do what had needed to be done.

Kirk took a step backward, giving in to his friend's plea. "I'm sorry, Bones. You're right. You're right. It's just that I feel so...." His voice gave out on him and turned away, surreptitiously rubbing a hand across his cheek. "I'm going to my quarters, Doctor, and try to get some sleep." He spoke the words without turning around.

"I can give you some medication that will help you."

Kirk shook his head, his back still to the doctor. He ran his hand across his face again. "No, thank you, Doctor. I'd rather not."

"Jim, you didn't get any sleep at all last night."

"Neither did you." He turned to face McCoy again and the doctor could almost hear the teeth grinding against each other through the tightly closed jaws. "Goodnight, Bones."

He managed a weak smile before he left the room. The sight of it almost broke McCoy's heart.

The intercom in the Captain's quarters buzzed softly. James Kirk, lying on the bed searching for the sleep which continued to elude him, rolled over on his side and switched it on. "Kirk here."

"Captain, this is Lieutenant Ericksen. I've uncovered some rather disturbing things on the planet which I would like to discuss with you."

Kirk's exhaustion faded. "Are you on board?"

"Yes, sir."

"Meet me in Briefing Room B in five minutes."

"Captain, I think it is important that Doctor McCoy be there, Sir."

Kirk hesitated. "Why?"

"I would rather not put it over the intercom, Sir."

"Very well, we'll be right down. Captain out."

Three minutes later, Kirk and McCoy walked into Briefing Room B to find Lieutenant Ericksen already there. Ericksen rose to full attention upon seeing them. Kirk noticed that his face was troubled. McCoy took a seat at the table. Ericksen and Kirk remained standing.

"Sir." The Lieutenant clearly did not know how to begin his report. Kirk stared at him, waiting. "Sir, we have uncovered some disturbing inconsistencies at the accident site."

"What do you mean, disturbing?"

"Well, Captain, to begin with, the fire itself appears to have been arson. We have evidence, corroborated by eyewitnesses, that the fire totally engulfed the building within fifteen minutes. That building was an abandoned derelict, sir. There was nothing flammable in there that would have spread a fire so

quickly."

Kirk digested this information without comment. Ericksen continued. "Sir, not only was the fire started by an apparent arson, but the building's collapse seems to have been engineered as well."

Kirk could feel the blood drain from his face as he began to realize where Ericksen was heading.

"There were twelve major support beams in the structure of that building," Ericksen continued. "We have evidence that six of them were primed with explosives and were shattered simultaneously."

"But Jim was right there," McCoy interjected. "He would have heard the explosions."

"Negative, Doctor," Ericksen replied. "The charges were not large, just enough to split the beams. It would have been inaudible over the roar of the fire."

Kirk looked at Ericksen silently for a moment. "Are you saying," he asked, his voice low, "are you saying that someone murdered Commander Spock?"

"I'm not sure, sir." The Lieutenant looked to the floor. "Someone wanted to destroy that building. Whether Commander Spock was the intended target of the collapse or not, I cannot say as yet. We checked on the fire alarm Premier Arrhidaeus claims his fire control station 124 received immediately after the fire. There is a log entry reporting the misdirected call, but we have no real evidence that the call ever really came in. The fire station has been closed pending official Arnebian investigation and we have been denied permission to interview fire personnel at the station."

"What about the child Spock was trying to rescue?" Kirk endeavored to keep his voice level.

This was the most damning evidence of all and Ericksen knew it. "Other than Commander Spock, we found no other bodies in the rubble. However, the Arnebians have not proved to be very cooperative. They insisted on clearing some of the debris away before we had a chance to investigate. They concentrated most of their efforts at the back of the building where the fire broke out...."

"They destroyed the evidence." McCoy had risen to his feet. "Those bastards destroyed the arson evidence. I'll bet you even money there never was a real living child in that building. They used the sound of the child's cry to lure him in there and once he was inside, they collapsed the walls and killed

him."

Kirk turned slowly to face Ericksen. "Lieutenant Ericksen, is that your opinion of what happened?"

"Sir, we only have circumstantial evidence to support such a conclusion." He hesitated. "There is one more thing that puzzles me, sir. Mr. Spock's communicator. He did have it with him when he entered the building, did he not?"

Kirk thought for a moment. "Yes, of course. He always carried his communicator."

"I knew he did, sir. Mr. Spock would never have allowed himself to be caught offguard. That's why it struck me as strange when we couldn't find it."

The thought formed slowly in Kirk's mind. "Do you think that someone was in there with him?"

"If he did in fact enter the building with his communicator, that would seem a logical assumption." Ericksen noted that both McCoy and Kirk flinched at his use of the word and he mentally berated himself for his thoughtlessness. "We searched the area where the body was found thoroughly. It was not there, sir."

"He could have dropped it." McCoy felt he had to make the suggestion. "He was running through a burning building. He could have dropped it."

Kirk appeared not to have heard him. "He was lured into that building and murdered," he spoke tonelessly. "Then the building was destroyed to cover it up."

"That is our opinion, sir, although we have no proof. Premier Arrhidaeus will of course dispute our findings."

Kirk's mind was spinning now. Only someone in high authority could have planned and executed such a complex plan successfully. He moved to the table and switched on the intercom.

"Lieutenant Uhura, I am transporting down to the planet. Please inform Premier Arrhidaeus and request that he meet with me immediately." He turned to his security officer. "Lieutenant Ericksen, I would like you and three of your men to transport down to the planet's surface with me."

Captain Kirk and the security detail waited at the beamdown point for ten minutes before Premier Arrhidaeus' envoy met them. The man came at a trot, unprepared and flustered.

"My apologies, gentlemen, for the delay. Your communications officer was quite insistant that someone from Premier Arrhidaeus' office meet you right away. The Premier is occupied with another matter at the moment, but I will take you to his office to await his return." Spoken in one breath, the words all ran together as the harried official attempted to regain his composure. "My name is Orridian. Please follow me."

He led them the short distance through the city's quiet streets. The festive crowd of yesterday was nowhere to be seen. The city seemed strangely quiet and Kirk felt a rising sensation of dread.

Orridian leaned over his shoulder. "Please do not tell my lord of the delay," he whispered urgently. "He does not forgive mistakes. Don't misunderstand me," he hastened to add, "he is a good ruler, a good employer, but he is...harsh with transgressions, even involuntary ones." He grinned sheepishly. Kirk felt repelled by him. Orridian was clearly terrified of Arrhidaeus and quick to show his fear. Why had Arrhidaeus sent this messenger? Kirk doubted that the Premier did anything without a calculating reason. The tone of this meeting promised to be far different from the congenial arrangements of the day before.

They arrived at the building and Orridian ushered them into an opulent antechamber. Bowing at the waist, he muttered another apology and backed out of the room. Voices were audible from the room adjoining theirs. Kirk could hear them but was unable to make out what was being said. The voices were low, conspiratorial. Then the sounds of one person leaving a moment later, the door separating the two rooms opened and Kirk found himself standing face to face with the man he had come to believe had murdered Spock.

"Enter, gentlemen." Arrhidaeus' clothes were as expensive as his living area and his cape swirled around Kirk's legs as he escorted them into the center of the huge room.

"Premier, I have some questions for you."

Arrhidaeus raised a jeweled hand. "Before you go on, Captain, I have something to say to you." He eyed the four security men. "I think that what I have to say is best spoken of between we two alone."

Kirk hesitated. Arrhidaeus clearly would not talk to him with the security guards present and, after a moment, he signalled them to wait outside. After they had left, Arrhidaeus crossed the room to secure the door, then turned to face his adversary.

"I am so sorry to hear of your tragic loss," he said as he returned to his desk and sat behind it. Kirk remained standing and turned to face him. "I understand that you and the Vulcan were good friends. A pity."

He smiled. Kirk moved toward him, his hands balled into tight fists.

"Captain Kirk, you look as if you are ready to kill me." Arrhidaeus spoke lightly, carelessly. "I have a gift for you. Perhaps you should wait to see what it is before you carry out your plan."

He reached into the top drawer of the desk and pulled out something. Kirk's gaze was locked on Arrhidaeus and for a moment, he did not look to see what the Premier held out to him. When he did look down, he felt his stomach tighten as his eyes rested on the communicator Arrhidaeus carried. For a moment, he could not speak.

"I see you recognize it, Captain. Kirk began to move toward him. His smile faded. "You are laboring under a misconception, my friend."

Kirk twisted the communicator out of his hand. "Where did you get this?" His voice was low, dangerous.

Arrhidaeus' face glowed with pleasure. "A guessing game? I love guessing games."

"I want answers." Kirk's hands gripped the edge of the desk. His knuckles were as white as ivory.

"Certainly, Captain." Arrhidaeus paused for effect. "Spock is alive, Kirk."

Kirk released his death grip on the desk and straightened, his eyes never leaving the face of the man who sat before him. Arrhidaeus noted with satisfaction the reaction his words had caused. Kirk paled visibly and shifted his weight slightly to maintain his balance. The effect was barely noticeable, however. If Arrhidaeus had not been observing him closely, he would not have noticed any change.

"You have almost as much self-control as your Vulcan friend, Kirk. My congratulations."

"Commander Spock is dead." Kirk's face was gray. "He died in the fire."

"On the contrary," Arrhidaeus stood and walked casually to the window, "a

Vulcan died in that fire." He turned to face Kirk again. "But it was not your Vulcan, Captain. Commander Spock is still alive." He smiled. "Would you like to see him?"

Rough hands gripped his arms like vises as he was alternately led and pushed forward. The blindfold that tightly covered his eyes allowed no light to enter and he found himself relying on the hands to guide him as they walked for what seemed like miles. Then, they stopped for a moment while Arrhidaeus exchanged words with two unrecognizable male voices. Kirk could hear the sound of a door opening and he was abruptly pushed forward. After a few steps, an arm stretched out before him and he was stopped. With one motion, the guard standing behind him pulled off the blindfold. The bright lights in the ceiling burned into his eyes and he instinctively raised his arm to shield them.

"Behold, Captain Kirk." Arrhidaeus gestured forward and Kirk, blinking as his eyes began to accustom themselves to the light, turned his head to follow the Premier's outstretched arm.

Spock lay on a table barely three feet before him. His wrists and ankles were bound with leather restraints, his head was thrown back, his eyes closed. His breathing was even and regular. Kirk quickly noted the intravenous tube feeding into a vein in his arm. He could see the thin yellow fluid that flowed into him from below the table and watched a tiny bubble caught in the fluid as it moved along the tube until it disappeared into Spock's arm.

Slowly, with one measured step, he covered the distance between them and put a hand out to touch the thin shoulder. Warm, always so warm. He was holding his breath as his hand travelled down the arm and came to rest on the long fingers, examining them as if seeing them for the first time. 'Such beautiful hands, I always envied you for your beautiful hands. He grasped the fingers tightly within his own as he fought to keep back the emotions threatening to break free. The grief which had consumed him yesterday was now being transferred into rage, an ice-cold, bitter anger directed toward Arrhidaeus. His thoughts, numbed momentarily at his first sight of Spock lying on the table, were crystal clear now and he could almost trace the course of the adrenalin as it spread through his body. He released the hand and turned back to Arrhidaeus.

"I want to talk to him."

Arrhidaeus shook his head. "I'm afraid that is impossible, Captain. He is heavily sedated and he will remain that way until we conclude our business."

Kirk looked to the tube feeding drugs into Spock's arm. 'Do these people know what they're doing? Arnebians are humanoids, but Vulcans and Arnebians are not identical.'

"I want to know that he hasn't been damaged by these alien drugs you've been giving him. I want to talk to you now."

His face seemed forged of iron and Arrhidaeus took an involuntary step backward and signalled one of the men standing across the table from Kirk. The man, thin and short in contrast to the burly guards surrounding them, reached below the table and disconnected the feeding tube.

Kirk moved his hands back to the sides of Spock's face. At the touch, the Vulcan's head began to move and he groaned softly.

"He will be disoriented for a moment. The feeling will pass."

Kirk did not take his eyes away from Spock. A tremor seemed to pass through the body before him. Then Spock took a long, deep breath and the brown eyes fluttered open. For a moment, they reflected nothing but puzzlement. Kirk noticed the bruised forehead for the first time. 'You didn't go down without a fight, my friend,' he thought wryly. Softly, he spoke his name.

The confusion cleared from Spock's eyes but he still seemed weak, tired. "Jim?" He closed his eyes again, trying to organize his thoughts, fighting the waves of nausea caused by the drugs. After a moment, he opened his eyes again. "Jim?" He spoke the name again and tried to raise his arm to reach for his friend. His eyes narrowed when he realized that he could not move. "What is happening?" He closed his eyes momentarily, as if marshalling his strength for what was to come.

"You've been kidnapped, Spock. You're being held in one of those subterranean chambers you were so worried about." He leaned down closer to him and searched his face. "How do you feel?"

Spock's eyes never left him. "I am somewhat disoriented. I am not in distress." The brown eyes narrowed. Spock could see the worry in Kirk's face but there was more than that, a deeper pain etched into his expression that was not there the last time he had seen him. "What has happened? Tell me."

Kirk looked down at that face, so strong, even now.

"We thought you were dead, Spock."

The words echoed within Spock's mind. He realized instantly the implication of them. "For how long?"

"Since yesterday. I only learned the truth a few moments ago."

The Vulcan's eyes bore through him. "Tell me," he said.

Kirk took a deep breath. "Another Vulcan died in that fire, Spock. The body was badly burned. We had no reason to suspect it wasn't you. The set-up was perfect. The body was transported back to the ship; McCoy did a quick autopsy, determined cause of death and officially logged it in. As far as Starfleet Command is concerned, you died in that fire, Spock."

The Vulcan turned his head as far as possible and looked around. He could feel the restraints pulling against his wrists and ankles. Faces peered down at him from every side, cold, severe faces, faces without compassion. His thoughts were clearer now, the debilitating effects of the drug having finally begun to wear off. He moved his hand as much as the restraints would allow and his fingers touched those of his friends. "The drugs they have given me have affected my mind," he said simply.

He could see Kirk pale at his words. Arrhidaeus quickly moved to stand beside him. "That is untrue!" he sputtered. "We tested those drugs on the other one. There were no ill effects."

"He was undoubtedly a full-blooded Vulcan. I am not. I believe that the Captain has the right to know that he may be bargaining for damaged goods."

"You'll be alive. Isn't that enough?"

"No," Kirk answered slowly. He turned to Spock and tried to read the silent communication in his eyes. A mind fusion. The words came into his mind as if from nowhere. He turned to Arrhidaeus. "I propose a mind link with Commander Spock. It will enable me to see into his mind directly. I will be able to...."

"No!" A tall, dark man standing in the back of the room pushed forward and tried to knock Kirk away from the table.

Arrhidaeus extended an arm. "This is Athelias. He is my chief interrogator. It is quite possible that he and Commander Spock will be getting to know each other very well in the days ahead."

"Vulcans are capable of all kinds of tricks. Don't let them touch each other."

Kirk appraised the man before him. His face was marred by lines of cruelty, but he was a weak man nevertheless. He used his power to hide his own cowardice, Kirk realized.

"What are you afraid of," he shot back. "He'll be beyond our sensor probes, strapped to your table, drugged to unconsciousness the whole time. What kind of magic do you think he can perform in that condition?"

Athelius felt the sting of the insult and, clenching his fists, took a step forward. Arrhidaeus moved between them. "I think we can make a concession on this one. The Captain is right. The Vulcan's position is clearly hopeless. He will never leave here alive without Kirk's cooperation. I see no harm in allowing this..." he paused, "affectionate guarantee."

"Mr. Spock is a touch telepath. You will have to release one of his arms."

Arrhidaeus nodded. Athelius moved roughly forward and loosened the straps on one side. Spock, who had been lying silently through the exchange, raised his hand to Kirk, who bent over to meet his touch. His fingers went quickly to the pressure points and Kirk could feel the familiar sensation of Spock's mind within his own.

Are you really all right?

Yes, Jim. The drug has no long-lasting effects. I needed to meld with you, to speak with you openly.

Spock, I will get you back.

That may prove to be difficult. They will ask you to do something that will be quite impossible for you and will do great damage to the Federation.

Is that Vulcan intuition?

The face in his mind smiled. Then the smile faded and the voice hesitated for a moment. When the words echoed through his mind again, their tone was soft and soothing. I will create a link between us. If rescue is possible, it will help you to find me. It would also inform you when rescue becomes unnecessary.

Spock....

When the link is broken, you will know that I am no longer alive. He sensed Kirk's anguish at the words but knew that he had to continue. It will be easier for you to continue with your life if you know that I am no longer alive, no longer a prisoner here. You will be able to put this episode behind you. I would not wish....

Spock's hand was roughly pulled away from Kirk's face. The abrupt severing of the meld made both of them gasp. Kirk staggered and grabbed the sides of the table to keep from falling. He reached down without thinking and touched



Spock's hand, feeling the tenuous link continue for a moment. Athelius grabbed his hand and pulled him away from the table.

"You should never have allowed this, Premier. They did something, the Vulcan did something to him. Look at his face."

All eyes turned on Kirk, belligerent, suspicious eyes. Spock opened his eyes as well and turned to his friend, but his look was filled with compassion and love.

Athelius reached for the Vulcan's free arm and roughly pulled the strap secure. He reached below the table to lock it in place, giving it a savage twist as he did. Kirk could see Spock flinch as the leather bit into his skin.

"It's too tight." Kirk said the words softly. Athelius responded by twisting it again and Kirk felt his restraint vanish. He grabbed Athelius by the shoulders, pulling him away from the table and pinning him to the wall.

"I said it was too tight!" His voice was loud now. He knew that he was shouting, could feel the hands of the others behind him, pulling at his arms, but all he could really see was Athelius, his eyes wide with fright now as he struggled in Kirk's grasp.

"You're not very brave when you're fighting someone who can fight back, are you," he hissed.

Arrhidaeus broke in. "We have no need for gratuitous cruelty, Captain Kirk. The restraints are loosened. Come and see for yourself."

Slowly, regretfully, Kirk released his grip and moved back to where Spock lay. The restraints were looser now. He could easily put his finger between the leather and the Vulcan's skin.

He turned to look at Arrhidaeus and his eyes were like chips of ice. "The maximum penalty for kidnapping is forty years in a penal colony. And," he dropped his voice to a whisper, "you may be assured that Starfleet will seek the maximum penalty unless you release Commander Spock now."

Arrhidaeus stared at him for a moment, trying to read the expression behind his expressionless face. "And what is the penalty for murder, Kirk?"

His fists clenched at his sides, Kirk took a deep breath. "Don't fence with me, Arrhidaeus. Let him go. The Federation will never let you get away with this. You have my word on that."

Arrhidaeus continued to watch him. Kirk could see a momentary expression of uncertainty flash across his face. "We're talking about Spock."

"We're talking about the kidnapping of a member of my crew, a Starfleet officer. Nothing else."

"And the fact that the officer involved is Spock makes no difference to you?"

"That's right."

Arrhidaeus smiled, a sly smile. "Come now, Kirk. You can't honestly expect me to believe that. I know of your friendship."

"My personal feelings do not interfere with my professional responsibilities. Commander Spock receives no special consideration. He is a member of my crew, nothing more."

Arrhidaeus' eyes narrowed. "You play a good game of poker, Captain. Shall we make the game more interesting? Now that you know what you're playing for, would you like to know why?"

He turned to look down at Spock, who had been intently watching him as he spoke. "I'm sure that you wouldn't be interested in such mundane details." He nodded to the doctor at Spock's left who quickly reached below the table and began the medication again.

Feeling the deadening effect of the drug, Spock turned his face to look up at Kirk and he faintly, almost imperceptibly, nodded his head. Then darkness smothered his thoughts and the brown eyes rolled up under their lids and closed.

Kirk continued to watch him for a moment. He reached his hand out and touched the Vulcan's face. The thought that he may never see Spock again was almost more than he could bear.

"And now, Captain, shall we get down to the fine details." He waved an expressive hand in the air. "We should not be discussing this here. I suggest we go back to the palace where we can be comfortable."

Two burly guards moved to flank Kirk while a third moved behind him and began to wrap the blindfold back around his eyes. The last thing he saw before the room was blacked out was the face of Spock, his expression as peaceful as that of a child in sleep.

Arrhidaeus studied the controlled stance of the man standing before him. Kirk's reaction to his startling revelation was not at all what he had expected. A good poker player, indeed.

He leaned forward with elbows and fixed Kirk with a piercing stare. "In eight hours, I will launch a mass invasion of Arneb 5. I want you to slow the Enterprise engines to impulse one power in seven hours and fifteen minutes. That will put your ship on the far side of Arneb 6 when the invasion takes off."

His eyes narrowed. "You are to take no action, make no attempt to deter my troops."

Kirk stared back at him with the same intensity, his jaw set, his eyes smoldering with anger. "I won't deal with you, Arrhidaeus. You can't seriously expect me to stand aside and allow you to launch a surprise attack on another Federation planet, to let millions die in order to possibly save the life of one person."

"You can plead ignorance. You were on the far side of the planet. We will only need a short amount of time to clear orbit. By the time the Enterprise returns to face Arneb 5, we will be out of visual range."

"Impulse one is not standard orbiting procedure. My entire crew will know what I'm doing."

"Handling your crew is your problem, Kirk." Arrhidaeus absently twirled the ring around on his finger. "Tell them whatever you want. Once my conquest of Arneb 5 is complete, I will return the Vulcan to you."

'Like hell you will,' Kirk thought to himself. The memory of Spock tied down to that table like some laboratory animal created such a rage within him that he had to take a deep breath to steady his voice. "The Federation will not let you get away with this, surely you know that. Arneb 5 has been a member of the Federation for nearly one hundred years. They will send her military support."

Arrhidaeus grinned. "We keep talking about Arneb 5 and the Federation, but you avoid the real issue here, Captain."

"The issue is your war against your neighbor."

"No. The issue is your friend's life."

Kirk's face stiffened. "The Federation will not submit to your blackmail."

"I am not dealing with the Federation. I am dealing with you. That is my

ace in the hole. You." He laughed, a deep, throaty laugh. "Underneath your Starfleet bluster, you're nothing but a sentimental weakling. You creatures of compassion always have at least one fatal weakness. And your weakness is a big one, Kirk, a chink in your impenetrable armor large enough for me to send my entire fleet through."

"You're wrong, Arrhidaeus."

"Am I?" The Premier rose to his feet and walked casually to stare out of the window. His feigned disinterest only served to further fuel Kirk's anger. When Arrhidaeus continued to ignore him, he covered the distance between them in three long steps and, locking his fingers around the Arnebian's arm, spun him sharply around.

"Why is Arneb 5 so important to you that you would risk this?"

Surprised at Kirk's aggressive action, Arrhidaeus looked down at the fingers digging into the brocade of his sleeve. Kirk continued to hold his arm in a tight grip and the Premier finally pulled himself away and forced a smile across his face. "Kirk, I had thought you to be an intelligent man. Surely you recognize the importance of Arneb 5 to me. I do not want to rule her people. They are as little deer hiding behind the Federation for generations, content to plod along in their primitive world, tending their crops and praying to their foolish gods. It is the planet I want, the minerals it contains. With the natural resources of Arneb 5 at my disposal, I can fuel my ships and protective screens indefinitely. The Federation will be hard pressed to challenge me. Do you really think that they will risk everything to come to the aid of a tiny planet of shepherders?"

"It will never come to that."

Arrhidaeus scanned his face, searching for the truths he believed lay hidden beneath the brave words. "You won't let him die, Kirk. You may think you will now, but when the time comes, you won't contest me. It will come to that, Captain."

They stood, inches apart, sizing each other up for a moment. Then Arrhidaeus wandered back to his desk and seated himself, taking an extra minute to straighten the robes gathered across his knees.

Kirk moved to stand before him again and he leaned forward, his hand on Arrhidaeus' polished desk. "Now you listen to me. I will blockade any fleet you put out. If you attempt to start a war, you will have to answer to the Federation for it. You've lost your gamble, Arrhidaeus. Cut your losses now and free Spock."

Arrhidaeus smiled, showing his teeth and Kirk had to resist the temptation to knock them all over his shiny black desk. "You're bluffing, Kirk."

He shook his head, his eyes never leaving Arrhidaeus. "No, Premier. I am not."

"So," Arrhidaeus picked up a gold pen from the desk and began twirling it around his fingers, "we have a stalemate. I say you won't interfere and you claim that you will." His attention left the pen and turned back to Kirk. "I know something of Human nature, Kirk. Reflect on the matter. Let your mind wander to the many times you and Spock have spent together, the things you've shared, the memories you have in common. The people of Arneb 5 are faceless to you. But Spock's face is one that you know quite well."

Kirk grabbed his hand and twisted the smooth fingers together until the rings dug painfully into the flesh. "Don't use my friendship with Spock against me. "Don't even speak of it."

Arrhidaeus tried to pull his hand back but the fingers were like steel. "Let me go. You're hurting me."

Kirk's eyes narrowed and he slowly took his hand away. His fingers left white indentations in Arrhidaeus' silky skin.

The Premier seemed to hesitate, his face pale. Then the oily smile returned. Kirk was bluffing, hiding behind the Captain's military bravado. He returned to his original train of thought.

"There is no need for you to decide immediately. Return to your ship or remain here. Wander about freely. I will not attempt to hinder your movements. The Vulcan is well hidden, well guarded. You do not have to decide anything for seven hours and," he paused to look at the clock, "forty-one minutes. I am well aware that the Enterprise's weapons could hold my entire force within orbit if you ordered it. But understand this, Kirk. If you try to prevent my ships from leaving orbit in any way, the Vulcan will die. And," he tilted his chair back until it touched the wall behind him, "if I play my cards right, I won't even be made to answer for it."

"You're deluding yourself. Starfleet Command would never let you get away with the kidnapping and murder of one of her officers."

"If you put the Enterprise in the path of my fleet, I demobilize and send profuse apologies to Sidetes and the Federation. I believe that I can talk myself out of any serious repercussions if all I do is orbit my own planet with my forces. Then I return to a peaceful status and do anything I want with the Vulcan because," he fixed Kirk with a coldly appraising stare, "one cannot kidnap a dead man. Due to the fine medical work of your own chief surgeon, you will have to deal with me either way or you will never get him back." Arrhidaeus casually picked his teeth with a slender nail. "He's dead, Kirk. Your own chief medical officer has declared him dead. I suppose now that McCoy will kick up a stink, perform a thousand tests to try and prove that the body

pulled from the wreckage was not that of Commander Spock. I, of course, will deny everything." He smiled, a feral grin. "Starfleet will have a hard time refuting the testimony of the Enterprise's own chief medical officer."

Listening to him, Kirk could feel the knot tighten in his stomach. No matter which way this played out, Arrhidaeus came out in control. They had all played right into his hands.

"Actually," Arrhidaeus leaned easily back in his chair, his hands folded behind his head, "I owe Starfleet a vote of thanks. It was their rigidity and military predictability that allowed me to hatch this whole plot and pull it off. As soon as I heard of the Exeter's damage, I knew that the Enterprise would be patrolling the area when time came for me to strike. A fortunate stroke of luck. I was aware, of course, of the strong personal friendship which existed between you and your first officer. Among senior officers on active duty, there is nothing that compares to it. Your friendship is legendary, Kirk. Once I knew with certainty that yours would be the ship which would contest me, the entire plan came to me in an instant." He gestured expansively. "An inspiration, if you will. It was not so difficult a thing to set up as you might think. What I had needed the most was time, and with Exeter indefinitely out of commission, I knew that I had that time. I could plan ahead and you both would still be here to contest me." He stood up and began walking back and forth, caught up in the wonder of his inventive mind. "We demolished a dozen buildings before we got the charges right, we coached those spontaneous natives you encountered at the fire scene, we modified the building, planted the explosives. Hell, Kirk," he laughed at the memory, "we even had rehearsals." He leaned forward and his eyes narrowed to slits. "I leaked the warnings to Sidetes, Kirk. I knew that he would run crying for help and I wanted the Enterprise here where I could keep an eye on you. The only really difficult part was getting the Vulcan," he paused, "how shall I say...volunteer. Vulcans, as you probably know, are remarkably tight-fisted about keeping track of their own. Finding a Vulcan drifter of the right age, weight and height was no easy task, I assure you. However, with the right amount of persuasion, anything is possible."

"The Vulcan we found in the ruins, he was dead before the fire started, wasn't he?" Kirk already knew the answer. The plan was perfect, carried out without a hitch. Arrhidaeus had fooled them all completely.

"Of course. We couldn't take any chances with him getting away, now could we? We killed him in the building before the fire was set. The child's cry was a recording, of course, even the old man whose fall twisted your ankle was planned. The Vulcan was our control over you, Kirk. It would have been a devastating setback to our plans if you had actually followed him in there and died in that fire. I doubt that Commander Scott puts such a high value on his life as you do."

Silence filled the room for a moment, then Arrhidaeus rose slowly to his feet. "If you will excuse me, Captain, I have urgent military details to attend to. I trust that you can find your own way out."

"I can assure you of this, Premier. I won't compromise the Federation."

A guard entered the room behind him. Arrhidaeus leaned forward, and his eyes were as cold and hard as glass. "It's up to you, Kirk. Your honor or your friend. The decision is yours. I can't really lose either way. And remember this, when I say that the Vulcan will die, I do not mean an easy death by phaser. Athelius has boasted that he can cut Spock open from sternum to pelvis and remove half the internal organs before he dies. I don't personally think that such a thing is possible, but he insists that he can successfully accomplish it. He's even taking bets on it, Kirk." Arrhidaeus' voice rose. "Would you care to lay some money on it. Odds so far...."

The words froze in his mouth when he saw the hatred that spread across Kirk's face.

"Don't underestimate me, Arrhidaeus." The words were spoken so softly that he could hardly hear them. Their eyes locked for a moment. Then Kirk spoke again, his voice level and charged with emotion. "I want you to remember something. There is one thing about this whole situation which you do seem to understand. Spock is my friend and if any harm comes to him, I will bring you to justice for it if it takes me the rest of my life. And I intend to live for a very long time. You may succeed in fooling the Federation with your medical evidence, but I know what you've done and I won't rest until you answer for it. You can bet your life on that."

His words seemed to cut Arrhidaeus' face in half. Then he turned and with measured steps, left the room.

Kirk returned to the ship, his answer fueling his steps while he called his officers together and rapidly related the situation to them. He turned to McCoy. "Doctor, we're going to need medical evidence for Starfleet Command. And we'll need it in a hurry."

McCoy had listened to his rapid fire report without interruption. He seemed as pale as death itself, but he said nothing and when Kirk finished, he gave him a blunt "yes, sir," and disappeared into the sickbay.

The others moved to the Briefing Room and sat, discussing the few options open to them. There was no discussion at all of acceding to the demands. Arrhidaeus' word had no value. Even if they gave in to him, he would probably kill Spock anyway. He would certainly not free him. If his claims for invulnerability were true, he would have no reason to free him and every reason to keep him imprisoned. There were any number of powers who would gladly pay a large price for such a man.

Their only chance was to find medical evidence to refute McCoy's original

death certificate. Arrhidaeus clearly believed that, if he lost his gamble, he could do anything he wished with Spock without regard for retribution from the Federation. He had said it himself. You can't kidnap a dead man. McCoy had to resurrect him, prove the body pulled from the rubble was not his. That would give them a weapon, probably their only weapon.

But they needed that weapon now. Kirk felt that he understood Arrhidaeus well enough to know that once his fleet was blockaded, he would kill Spock to avenge himself on the person who had frustrated his plans. Spock was more valuable alive than dead, but Arrhidaeus was not ruled primarily by logic or reason, but by passion and a lust for power. If Kirk deprived him of that power, he would have his revenge. Their only chance was to convince him that they could refute McCoy's original report, and convince him before the invasion took off, before he lost face with himself and his people.

All heads turned as the whir of the door filled the room and McCoy walked into the Briefing Room, his face a mask of despair. His shoulders were stooped and Kirk knew without asking what the doctor's report would be.

"Jim." He avoided looking into the captain's eyes. "Captain, it is necessary to make certain chemical changes in order to put a body in stasis for any extended period of time. I knew that we wouldn't be near Vulcan for some time.... He looked up. The lines around his eyes etched deeply into the skin. He looked like an old man.

"Jim, I'm sorry." His voice was pleading. "I had no reason to suspect anything like this. I didn't run any more sophisticated tests once I had the Vulcan I.D. confirmed." He sank heavily into the chair and stacked the computer discs on the table in front of him. "I could run DNA tests. Spock's physiological structure was unique, as you know," a sorrowful half-smile flitted across his face. "I should be able to come up with enough evidence to convince Starfleet that such an investigation is in order."

"That would take too long." Kirk spoke to no one in particular. "We have six hours left. We have to make our decision within six hours."

For a moment, no one spoke. It was obvious to all that only one decision was possible.

"Mr. Scott," Kirk's voice broke the silence. "Do we have the power to blockade the entire Arnebian fleet?"

"Aye, sir, we do. Arnebian forces would easily overcome those of Arneb 5, but they're no match for the Enterprise. Aye, we could bottle them up alright."

Silence again descended. Then Kirk rose slowly to his feet. His back was straight and his face calm. "Mr. Scott, I shall be going down to the planet's

surface with a small security team. While I am gone, you will be in command. Inform the crew of what has happened and have all weapons fully charged. I shall not be gone long."

He could feel their eyes on him as he stiffly walked from the room.

A solitary figure walked amidst the bustling crowds of the square and came to stop before the entrance to the huge prison facility. This was where he had been taken, where Arrhidaeus had taken him to see Spock, of that he was sure. The prison guards had led him through the underground corridors and mazes for what seemed like miles, his eyes tightly covered with a blindfold. Cloak and dagger. If there wasn't so much at stake, he could have laughed at the image. Slowly, he put a hand up to touch the cold outer wall, then, with an audible gasp, pulled his hand back as if it had been burned. Spock was no longer here. Somehow when he touched the stones, he knew with a certainty he could not describe that the Vulcan was no longer within these walls. His mind began to race. Arrhidaeus had clearly intended to give him the impression that Spock would be held here for the duration of the crisis. Without the fusion with Spock, he would have had no reason to doubt it. This was the only major prison facility in Balas, its underground passageways impenetrable to assault. Kirk felt a moment of irrational fear at the thought that Spock may have been taken out of the city entirely, could be a hundred miles away by now. But then the familiar presence reasserted itself. Spock was not here, within these walls, but he wasn't far away either. Still in the city. If Arrhidaeus believed that Kirk would direct any possible rescue at this facility, perhaps the true place of Spock's imprisonment would not be heavily guarded. The Vulcan would undoubtedly be kept drugged and would himself pose no threat to his captors. If Arrhidaeus felt that Kirk would not look for him elsewhere, perhaps he would get careless. Hope ignited within Kirk's chest. He had plans to make. When he turned from the prison wall and walked across the square, there was a new determination in his steps.

Pulling out his communicator, he signalled the ship. "Patch me through to sickbay."

After a moment, McCoy's voice came through the communicator.

"Bones, I need you to come down."

"On my way."

"Jim, it's been four hours. Aren't you getting any definite sensations?" They had been wandering the streets, tracing the winding patterns of the city roads, searching for any definite sensations. So far, their attempts had been fruitless. The feelings that Kirk sensed were too vague and undefined to help

them narrow their search. McCoy focused on the street before them. It looked like the scores they had already searched. Captain Kirk walked beside him, his stride long and effortless.

"I get the same general sensations that I've had all along, Bones, but nothing specific. I know that he's in this area, but I can't seem to pinpoint anything more definite." The frustration and worry echoed in his voice. They were running out of time.

"Jim, we've been down nearly every street in this district. Maybe we should expand our search pattern."

The road ahead curved to the right. Kirk continued to walk determinedly forward. "Bones, I know he's near here. Maybe...."

The words trailed off and he found himself freezing in mid-stride. A building only now becoming visible stood at the end of the street. Nothing distinguished it as being anything out of the ordinary. There was an inconspicuous government sign affixed near the entrance, Arnebian Labor Relations it said, and a few bored soldiers stood at half-attention near the door. Kirk and McCoy had passed a dozen official buildings just like it in the past few hours. McCoy looked at Kirk expectantly. The expression on the Captain's face astonished him.

"Jim, have you found him?"

"Yes."

The computer-enhanced image formed on the Briefing Room B monitor. Kirk and Ericksen leaned forward and began to memorize the building's layout. Ericksen pointed to the passageways that angled away from the entrance and disappeared from the sensor probe. Kirk felt his heart sink, although he knew better than to expect anything else. Arrhidaeus was indeed getting careless, but he was not stupid. Spock was still being held beyond the range of their scanners. The transporter room was not to be the avenue of his return. Kirk straightened and looked at Ericksen. They would have to go in after him.

"Lieutenant Ericksen," he said, his voice determined. "Opinion."

Ericksen studied the diagram a moment longer before replying. "Sir, the government office is clearly intended as a front for the facility belowground." He pointed to the passageways. "Since the corridors go off our sensors, we have no way of knowing how extensive they are or how heavily guarded. However," he furrowed his brow, "it is my opinion that the underground facility is not large. The aboveground building is simply too small to permit large volumes of traffic

through there. We...."

"There could be another entrance connecting the corridors from a different location," McCoy cut in.

Ericksen looked uneasily at the Captain. "We really have no way to ascertain that without a thorough sensor scan of the entire area, one building at a time. We don't have time for that, sir." He continued. "We have been monitoring traffic around the building for the past hour and there is little activity either in or out." He straightened. "Security seems lax. It is my opinion, Captain, that Premier Arrhidaeus believes he has safely hidden Commander Spock here and that no attempt will be made on the building. I would recommend a frontal entry with a minimum number of men."

Kirk studied the diagram again. Ericksen's opinion had seconded his own. He swore silently at the sensor blackout. They would be wandering blind once they penetrated the building. They would need time to find him down there and time was the one thing he didn't have.

He wondered briefly if Arrhidaeus would keep Spock alive in any event. The only hope that they would have, ironic as it was, lay in the gruesome method of execution Arrhidaeus had planned for Spock. If he did intend to drag the murder out, it would give them some time to find him. Some, but not very much, and every moment they wasted searching dead ends down there would come at a terrible cost.

Kirk took a deep breath and turned his thoughts away from the image. "We can't risk a large party." His eyes were locked on the monitor as he spoke. "Lieutenant Ericksen, I want you and two of your people outfitted in Arnebian military uniforms, two lieutenants, two colonels. Doctor McCoy will be outfitted as a major, make the uniform different." He paused for an instant. "Make him a brevet major."

He looked up from the monitor and his eyes met McCoy's. "Bring a complete medical kit, Doctor."

McCoy nodded silently. His expression was grim. Kirk knew that he felt responsible for what had happened, but he was in no mood to offer consolation right now.

He turned to Scott. "We can't risk a signal until we've found him in case the Arnebians trace our beam. But when you get that signal, get us out quick, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, Sir. We'll be ready."

It was one hour and four minutes later. Captain Kirk sat in his command chair nervously rubbing his thumb across the bottoms of his fingertips.

"Mr. Sulu, slow to impulse power one."

He could feel the ship begin to decelerate as the impulse engines cut back. He switched on the intercom. "Transporter room. Lieutenant Ericksen?"

"Here, sir. We are ready."

"The building has been pinpointed for beaming?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have my costume ready?"

"Yes, sir. Everything is ready."

"Is Doctor McCoy there yet?"

"He's on his way, sir."

Kirk hesitated. Ericksen was a competent officer. He knew that everything would be taken care of. He felt ready to jump out of his skin. "Very good. Wait for instructions." He snapped off the intercom. 'And pray,' he thought silently.

"Lieutenant Uhura, transmit that message to Starfleet Command once the Arnebian pick us up at planet dawn. Is probe telemetry coming in, Mr. Chekov?"

"Yes, sir. There is no activity as yet."

Kirk rubbed his forefinger against his lips in concentration. The probe would relay signals to them from the planet dayside, alerting them when the Arnebian invasion force took to the air. He looked at the ship's chronometer. If Arrhidaeus was punctual, that would be any moment now.

"Sir!" Chekov's urgent tone cut through the silence on the bridge. "Signals from the probe, sir. Many vessels, Captain," he paused, listening as the probe relayed information.

Kirk watched him anxiously. Why couldn't he do it faster? Spock always did it faster. But then Spock could read the signals directly, without translation.

"Sir, I'm getting information on over seventy vessels lifting off from the planet's surface. They're maneuvering into formation, coordinate forty-seven point five, mark thirty-eight.

"Sulu, increase power to four." Leaning forward on his elbows, the Captain of the Enterprise watched as the distinct coastlines and river valleys below blurred into one hazy image. "How long before they spot us, Helmsman?"

"Twenty-two seconds, sir."

"Transporter room." His hand slapped on the button. "Be ready to go."

"We'll be ready, sir."

The sun blinded him for an instant as the Enterprise moved into planet dawn. He could see the ships in the stratosphere below, buzzing around each other like bees around a hive. "Lieutenant Uhura, open a channel to the commander of that fleet."

For a moment, there was silence.

"Lieutenant...."

"Here it comes, sir. On screen."

The visage that faced him on the viewscreen was grim. They glared at each other for a moment. Kirk stood up.

"Commander. I must ask you to disarm your vessels and return to the planet's surface immediately.

The Arnebian officer hesitated. Clearly, he had not expected this to happen.

"Commander, I have the power to force you to comply if necessary."

"I must get instructions, Captain Kirk. Please allow me a moment to contact Premier Arrhidaeus."

"One minute, Commander. No longer."

One minute and ten seconds later, Kirk paced the bridge, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. "Sulu," his voice barked, "lock phasers on those...."

"Captain," Uhura's voice broke in. "I'm getting a voice communication, sir." Her voice lowered an octave. "It's from the Premier himself, sir."

Kirk met her gaze. "Put him on, Lieutenant," he said softly.

The familiar face filled the viewscreen. 'Strange,' Kirk thought. 'I never noticed how simian it was.'

"Kirk, you have called my bluff."

"I'm not bluffing, Premier, and neither are you," he replied evenly.

"Quite true, quite true." The dark eyes glittered. "My ships will withdraw. We cannot fight you and hope to win. I knew that from the beginning. I had thought that I had taken care of that problem. It would appear, Captain, that I have underestimated you."

Kirk felt his hands begin to tremble and he held them tightly behind him. "Premier, there is no need to compound your trouble with murder. Release Commander Spock and I will speak in your behalf at the Starfleet hearing."

Arrhidaeus laughed. "They will certainly depose me, Kirk, probably imprison me as well, put some weakling in control of Arneb in my place. Do you see all this," he gestured to the room behind him, his voice rising. "I have spent most of my adult life accumulating this wealth, this power. I gambled with you, Kirk. If I had won, I would have increased my power a hundredfold. But my gamble lost and I am finished." He fixed Kirk with a cold stare. "Do you know what will give me the most satisfaction while I sit out the rest of my life in some isolated outpost at the edge of the galaxy?" He smiled when he saw the Human pale. "It will be the thought that you are suffering each day along with me. Even as we speak, Kirk, he is already dying."

The viewscreen went dark.

Kirk hit the intercom button. "Transporter room. Be ready. I'm on my way."

The scene before the Arnebian Labor Relations Building was in sharp contrast to that of a few short hours before. Gone was the lax attitude of the guards, the bored indolence of the employees who had leisurely come and gone. Stiff government troops stood sentry duty outside the building. Military alerts had been issued throughout the city as troops took up positions at all state facilities, including those as seemingly unimportant as this one.

A group of five men, high ranking officers judging by their uniforms, approached the sentry at the building's entrance and the young soldier raised his arm stiffly in salute. The officer in the lead nodded his head imperceptibly. "Corporal." He began to move on. The sentry realized that he should ask for the officers' identification. The man stopped and turned around. "Corporal, is everything quiet here?"

"Yes, sir. This entire area of the city is as still as anyone could ask for."

The hazel eyes smiled. "Missing out on the action, eh? Don't worry, soldier," he patted the younger man paternally on the arm, "you'll get your chance. Carry on."

"Sir!" The young sentry saluted again as the five men passed his station and entered the building. He felt elated. Officers were not known among the Arnebian military for being friendly with their troops.

The velvety darkness slowly began to recede. The outline of lights formed over his head and for a moment, Spock could not remember where he was. There was someone, a face peering down to look at him. Black eyes, like pieces of obsidian. He struggled to rise but the restraints were tighter now and he could sense that there were more of them. Once circled his neck and, as he tried to raise his head, it caught against his trachea, making it difficult to breathe. Athelius continued to watch him. He smiled, a smile without joy and Spock shuddered.

"You do remember me from earlier today, when your Captain came to visit you, do you not?"

When the Vulcan failed to respond, he continued. "He was very quick to come to your defense then. But," he paused and the mirthless smile appeared again, "there is no one to help you now, just you and me. You are completely alone, Spock, and my face will be the last one you will ever see."

Spock turned away and focused his eyes on the ceiling lights. 'So,' he thought, 'it has come to pass.' He felt a strange sort of relief that it would finally be over. Jim had not failed him. He had done the necessary thing and had accepted the consequences of his act. Spock wondered if he would have found the strength necessary to do that if the situation had been reversed.

"We have moved you to another location, Commander. You are now miles from where you were held before. The Premier's troops are waiting for Kirk to attempt a rescue at the Balas Central Prison. If he is foolish enough to do so, he will be killed. Do not worry," he reached up and ran his fingers along the side of Spock's face, "I have left word that I wish to be informed if he dies. That knowledge, I think, will cause you more pain than anything I will do, will it not?"

Spock continued to stare at the ceiling, but Athelius could see his jaw tighten at the touch. His fingers continued to trace a pattern around the Vulcan's face. "Tell me," he asked abstractly, watching his fingers as they moved across the alien skin, "is it true that Vulcans never cry? I have heard that story, but I don't believe it myself. Everything cries, Spock, in one way or another. You Vulcans are, after all, flesh and blood creatures," his hand had travelled to the nape of Spock's neck and he grabbed a handful of hair and savagely pulled the Vulcan's head back. "You need air to breathe, just like we do, do you not?" He continued pulling, watching as the strap around the Vulcan's neck cut into his skin. Spock fought to resist the urge to struggle. He knew that Athelius would not kill him this way. He was only playing with him now, warming himself up for the task ahead. Spock tried to relax as Athelius continued to hold his head in an iron grip. Their faces were only inches apart now as Athelius silently watched as Spock fought for control. The room was beginning to lose focus now, his head felt like it would explode. 'Elevated blood pressure in the brain,' he thought clinically. Suddenly, the hands were gone. Athelius stood abruptly and moved away from the table, the sounds of the Vulcan gasping for air following him across the room.

A small metal table stood against the far wall. Athelius studied it for a moment, then picked up a thin, finely bladed knife.

"Arrhidaeus was quite confident that Captain Kirk would do whatever he asked to get you back." He studied the blade in his hands. "The Premier has been planning this invasion ever since he took power seven years ago. He realized, of course, that a Federation Starship would never be far enough away to give him enough time to consolidate his victory before he had to fight you." Athelius spoke as he walked slowly back toward the examining table, studying the shiny blade in his hands. "He needed some cooperation, someone to look the other way for a while. He had thought he'd found that someone in your Captain Kirk. Apparently," the knife flashed before Spock's eyes, "apparently he was wrong. The Premier was quite beside himself with rage after your Captain blockaded the fleet. Unfortunately, Captain Kirk is beyond the reach of his vengeance, so it has befallen you to suffer the consequences of your captain's moral righteousness."

He stood over the table. Spock's eyes were transfixed by the lights that

played off the blade. 'Almost irridescent,' he thought. 'In some ways, it is really quite beautiful.'

Athelius watched the Vulcan's face. There was no fear there, the expression was ambiguous, closed. Athelius liked to think of himself as a man who loved a challenge and here before him was such a challenge. Could he evoke a cry out of this man of stone, he wondered. His hands reached out to pick up the edge of the blue tunic at the neckline. The knife was razor sharp and with surgical precision, Athelius began to cut the tunic off the Vulcan's unresisting body a section at a time.

Silently, James Kirk led the party of Starfleet officers through the brightly lit corridors belowground. The building was large, with passageways going in many directions. There were few guards in evidence, however, and they had been easy to avoid. Kirk was not surprised at the lack of security. Athelius had been too confident, fatally overconfident. He felt he had everything so carefully planned that nothing could cause it to unravel. However, he had not counted on the Vulcan mind fusion. Kirk could not expressly say how he knew when Spock had been moved or how he had found the building where he was being held. He couldn't even articulate how he knew that Spock still lived. It was more like a sensation, a feeling that seemed to pervade his entire being. He found himself wishing that once this was all over and Spock was safe, the feeling would remain with him.

They proceeded silently down the corridor until it split into two directions. Kirk ran his fingers along the wall, his eyes closed in concentration. He knew that Spock was in this building, but the sensations were weak and he was unable to determine which way to proceed.

'Spock.' His brow furrowed with concentration. 'I'm not a telepath, Spock. I need your help. I'm not very good at this.' The words filled his mind, and then, as if in response, a feeling began to grow within him. He shook his head as if to dispel it, but the sensation remained. A feeling of humiliation, vulnerability. His skin suddenly felt cold and he ran his hand unthinkingly over his chest. McCoy moved over to stand beside him. Perspiration began to bead out on his face.

"Jim," the furrows in the Doctor's face deepened, "are you all right?"

Kirk turned to him, his eyes wide. Without a word, he turned to the corridor on the left and began to move rapidly up the hall, his pace increasing as he moved. McCoy reached out to slow him down, but all he got was a fistful of air. Travelling at this speed was too dangerous. It would be difficult to escape discovery if they encountered guards unexpectedly. He was reaching again for Kirk when suddenly the Captain let out a gasp and staggered backward into his arms, nearly knocking them both to the floor. His hands were clutching at his chest, his head thrown back against McCoy's chest.

"What is it. What's happening to you?" McCoy eased him to the floor as the others congregated around them, peering nervously down the corridors. Kirk struggled in his arms, his hands now grabbing at his throat. He was gasping as if he could not breathe. McCoy shook him, noting the blue tinge to his face. "Breathe, damn it," he whispered the words, fearful of making noise. He could see that Kirk was choking but could not determine the cause. He shook him harder. Kirk's head struck the wall behind him with a loud crack.

The spell was broken. Kirk collapsed against the wall, his chest heaving spasmodically. "Spock, oh my God, Spock." His voice was strained as he struggled to his feet, his hand again covering his chest, trying to protect the wound that had been cut into the skin of the other. He began to move up the hall again, his hands frantically feeling along the wall as he searched for the trail.

The pain began once more. He could feel it grow stronger, but the intensity was less than before. 'He's controlling it,' Kirk thought. He knows now that it hurt me too and he's trying to block it.' The sensations abated and Kirk paused uncertainly at the head of another corridor. 'Don't block it too much, Spock,' he pleaded silently. 'It's my trail.'

Suddenly, he began to discern another sound. He motioned to the others and began to move in the direction from which it came. There was a door at the end of the corridor, a small door with nothing distinguishable about it, but as Kirk drew closer, his hesitation disappeared and he broke into a run, throwing his full weight against it and nearly falling as it opened to reveal the brightly lit room within. The shock of the sudden entry sent Athelius staggering back against the table and the knife fell from his hand and clattered noisily on the floor. He turned and tried to run but slipped on the blood at his feet and fell, sprawling face down on the floor near Kirk's feet. He held up his hands in supplication, then collapsed into an awkward heap when the stun hit him.

In the afterglow of the phaser beam, Kirk turned to Spock, who was watching him from the table. 'God, he seems so calm,' Kirk thought. 'But of course he knew I was coming.' The security team immediately surrounded the table, freeing the restraints and making room for McCoy who flashed up a momentary look of welcome and proceeded to work on the injuries.

Kirk felt himself as in a dream as he walked to stand beside the table. Their eyes were locked together but they did not speak.

"The wounds are messy, but not serious, Jim." McCoy did not look up from his examination. "There's been a lot of bleeding, but nothing a few days in sickbay won't cure." He reached out to lay a hand on Spock's shoulder. The thought of what they would have found in this room if they had arrived any later was something he preferred not to think about.

Kirk pulled out his communicator and signalled the ship. "We've found him, Mr. Scott. Lock in on my signal and beam us up immediately." He looked down at

Spock again, lying calmly on the table as if he had just awakened from an afternoon nap. "Mr. Spock," he broke their silence at last, "I am pleased to see you."

"Captain's log, Stardate 2743.2. With the arrival of the other Federation vessels, the Enterprise has ceased to have any direct role in the Arnebian affair. Premier Arrhidaeus and Athelius have been taken into custody, pending trial. Commander Spock and myself will be asked to testify." He looked over at Spock, working quietly at the science station as if none of this had ever happened. He continued his report. "Under Federation supervision, a moderate Arnebian has temporarily been placed in control of the government until standard elections can be held. The mood of the people seems now to have swung toward support for a peaceful settlement to their problems with Arneb 5. It will be interesting to see if their attitude will remain permanent."

He switched off the recorder and stood up, then walked slowly over to the science station. McCoy had discharged Spock from Sickbay after two days, Spock insisting that he could return to duty after only one. Kirk could see Spock's impatience to get things back to normal. He was uncomfortable being the source of so much attention, the cause of so much distress. So now he was back where he belonged, looking so natural sitting there, his mind on some obscure mathematical problem that Kirk couldn't begin to understand. He stood for a moment, watching him work.

Spock sensed his presence behind him and turned to meet the Captain's eyes. He seemed troubled.

"What is it, Spock?" Kirk climbed the step to stand beside him.

"I was wondering who he was, sir."

"Who?"

"The Vulcan who died in my place. He must have family, someone who cares for him. I was wondering who he was, who they are." He hesitated for a moment. "It would be most difficult to lose someone and never know what had become of them. Do you not agree?"

Their eyes met. "Yes, Mr. Spock. I agree."

"Captain, I request your permission to use ship's computers to attempt to identify him. I will work in my quarters at night if you wish."

Kirk put his hand on Spock's arm. His eyes were soft with emotion. "No,

Spock. It's all right. Give it top priority. You may begin at once if you wish."

Spock nodded. "Thank you, Jim." He motioned for Chekov to take over his station and walked to the turbolift. On impulse, Kirk moved in behind him just as the doors closed. For a moment, they said nothing to each other as the lift took them down.

"Do you think you'll be able to find out who he was?" Kirk broke the silence at last.

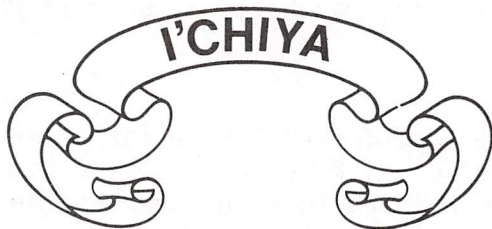
"Yes, Captain. I will find out."

Kirk smiled at the determination. "Spock." He hesitated. He had told himself that if he got Spock back alive, he would say these things, as yet unspoken between them. "Spock, when I thought you were dead, I...I've never felt like that before. It was like a part of me was missing." He groped for words.

Spock looked down at him, then reached out to touch his arm. "Do you wish the link restored?"

Kirk looked away. Spock had broken the link in Sickbay as soon as they had returned to the ship. For an instant, Kirk had not even realized what he had done. He hadn't been prepared for the emptiness which followed the severing. He felt an almost physical hunger to have it restored to him. "Would you do that for me, Mr. Spock?"

Gentle hands rested on his shoulders and turned him around. Then they rose to touch his face and he could feel the warmth flow through him again. He closed his eyes and after a moment, heard the turbolift doors open. When he opened his eyes again, he was alone. But the presence remained. Not alone, not completely alone ever again, neither would ever be.



by SANDY ZIER

My friend
You've been my steadfast companion
When I was a child
- tormented by my peers
You were always there
Offering solace, love... friendship

My friend
I honor your faithfulness
Your loyalty is unprecedented
- I've turned my back on you
- Left you behind to leave home
Yet you've been joyful upon my return
- forgiving my prior neglect

As I grew
I shunned you
- passed you off as childish
- needing to maintain my independence
Still you were there to comfort
- when I silently suffered through my
frustration of adolescence

As an adult
I denied you -- never spoke of you
Yet when confronted...and you referred
to as a 'teddy bear'
I made you out a ferocious beast
Concealing the actual truth of the
accusation

Now you're in need
You grow old and you suffer
Do you not deserve the same
- loyalty, faithfulness... love
You've shown me all these years?

How can I deny you
- a death in dignity
- rather than wasting away...
...living each day, hoping it would end.

I honor you, my friend
With the same love and devotion you've shown me
This one small act of love
I can do for you... my friend

...Tal Shaya

And I did... do love you.



The Best Of Both Worlds

Beverly Volker

Spock eased the aircar into the assigned docking bay and shut down the controls. He turned to face one of his two passengers, whose expression was puzzled - more puzzled than it had been when the three men had left San Francisco.

"The East Coast?" Kirk questioned. "My birthday surprise is on the East Coast of America?"

The other passenger grinned. "The city of Baltimore, to be more precise, Jim-boy." McCoy always affected a deep southern drawl whenever he thought he was being clever. "One of the oldest cities on the continent and quite popular with certain types of tourist trade."

Kirk went along with the mood. "I'm familiar with its history, Bones. In fact, I've always wanted to visit here."

Spock deactivated his safety field and rose from the navigator's seat. "The doctor and I are aware of that desire and it is for that reason we chose this fair city as a port of departure for the other part of your gift."

"Port of departure?" Kirk grinned. "Now I am intrigued. All right you two, I've gone along this far. What have you cooked up now?"

"If you will come with me, Jim." Spock moved toward the car's hatch.

"Your curiosity will be satisfied shortly."

Kirk threw a glance at McCoy, who was also preparing to disembark, and the doctor answered his gaze with a nod. Shrugging, Kirk followed his friends and the three men stepped out into a bright, warm day at Baltimore's harbor.

The city's past had been preserved, not so much in actual appearance, as in atmosphere and flavor. That this had once been a busy, well-known seaport was evident from the businesses and trades which occupied the waterfront area. Not unlike their own bay in San Francisco, Baltimore was a city which had developed largely because of its access to the waterways which had joined North America to the rest of the world back in the days of the great sailing ships. Starfleet Headquarters, however, had changed San Francisco, making it the hub of inter-space travel and trade. While Baltimore was a modern, thriving city, it had retained a feel of history about it - antique vessels shared space in the harbor with sleek twenty-third century air-and-water vehicles.

The three officers from the West Coast moved along the dock, taking in the sounds, sights and smells of the bustling waterfront. It was a pretty place with carefully tended trees and gardens acting as a backdrop for stores, restaurants and office buildings. Many of the population were obviously tourists, but just as many seemed to be locals going about their daily business in this colorful section of the city.

Spock moved with purpose toward a destination still unknown to Kirk. Yet the Vulcan was not impatient, allowing his Human companion to stop repeatedly, distracted by some fascinating display. McCoy, too, was in a tolerant, festive mood, pointing out antique shops and stores featuring nautical clothing and appointments.

Kirk was delighted. He bought an ancient sextant in the first shop they perused and an old sea-captain's hat in one of the clothing stores. He tried it on, placing it at a jaunty angle and was rewarded by nods of good natured approval from his friends and the salesgirl. He talked McCoy into purchasing a bright red silk ascot, but couldn't quite convince Spock that a navy-blue coat with brass buttons and sleeve braid was just the touch of class the Starfleet officer needed.

"This is a great trip." Kirk was more than mildly enthusiastic as they walked toward a marina at the end of the waterfront. "I want to thank both of you for bringing me here and sharing my birthday."

"We told you that this was only a departure point," McCoy hinted, throwing Spock an exaggerated wink.

"That's right..." Kirk remembered. "So what else have you two rigged up?"

"Rigging is a part of it, as a matter of fact." It was Spock's turn to be cryptic, but not for long. They had reached their destination. "Rigging, sails, masts, a deck...."

Kirk followed Spock's gaze to a tall clippership, anchored to its own pier, a wooden gangplank indicating an easy access aboard. The Admiral's eyes widened in awe at the majestic beauty of the proud old sea vessel.

"Your ship, Sir." There was a hint of awe in the Vulcan's eyes as well. "Happy Birthday."

"My...ship...!? Kirk barely managed.

McCoy grinned. "Well, for the next two weeks at least, Jim. Spock and I chartered it for you. It's fully manned by an experienced crew and yours to command, to take wherever you like. And we kinda thought we'd go along for the ride too, just to make it more fun."

Kirk was delighted, as thrilled as a kid on Christmas. His whole face reflected his joy. "I...I hardly know what to say. Let's go on board!"

Spock withdrew a tape from his pocket. "Your leave papers, Jim. Two weeks. Admiral Nogura sends his wishes for a smooth voyage and a birthday greeting."

Still grinning, Kirk took the tape. "I see you two have thought of everything. I'll bet you even made arrangements to board my dog and collect my messages. Very well, Gentlemen, shall we...." He almost ran up the gangplank, requested permission to go aboard from the crewman on duty and then waited formally as the officer in charge turned command over to him. The captain introduced himself as Commander Jack Davis. He was a middle-aged man with over thirty years of sailing experience.

"Signed on to sail the seas when I was still a kid," Davis explained as he led the three Starfleet officers to the bridge. "My dad was a sailor before me. It's a lost art, you know, Admiral; but once you feel the sea beneath your feet, the wind in your sails...aaah, it's a love affair that grips you and never lets go."

Kirk smiled, understanding the man's passion. It was not unlike his own obsession with the stars. He glanced at McCoy and remembered his own words...one night 'long ago' on a particularly difficult mission. 'All I ask is a tall ship...you could feel the wind at your back in those days, Bones.'

On the bridge, Davis familiarized them with the hub of the ship. Though Kirk would be in command, Davis would do most of the actual navigating and

sailing, relying on the experience of a seasoned crew. He would be more than proud, he told Kirk, to teach him how to sail the ship, though. The Admiral's reputation preceded him and the seaworthy crew had no reservations about taking orders from the man who had commanded Starfleet's finest starship.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy spent the next hour planning their itinerary with Davis. When their course had been mapped out, a crewman was called to the bridge and given the assignment of escorting the three officers on an inspection tour of the ship. When Kirk gave the word, Davis would pull anchor and their voyage could begin.

The old Clippership, renamed ENTERPRISE, in Kirk's honor and for the purpose of his voyage only, was over four hundred years old. It had been kept seaworthy in its original condition with materials as close to the originals as possible. It was not a large ship; in fact Kirk was amazed to find how compact and small it really was. Its tall masts with their great white sails, its beautifully carved masthead and polished wood hand-rails and decks gave the illusion of a much larger ship.

Descending below the main deck two, then three levels, Kirk and his companions discovered that the deeper into the ship they went, the smaller and shorter each deck became. All three had difficulty walking upright on Deck three. Kirk's sleeping quarters was small, although he occupied the Captain's quarters, the most lavishly appointed on the ship, it was still barely more than a cubby hole with a built-in bunk, desk and chair. Spock's and McCoy's adjoined his and were similarly appointed. Though the ship was compact, it was efficient and well-maintained, its crew proud of their great lady of the sea. Kirk was eager to set sail.

Dusk was just beginning to fall over the city as the tall ship, ENTERPRISE, drifted away from her moorings and slid gracefully out into the harbor. By the time they were away from the city, night would be upon them and Kirk would be able to view his beloved stars from the polished deck of his earthbound starship. It would be morning before they would reach the high seas and set their full sails to the wind.

Dinner was served in the Captain's dining room. It was a private affair with white linen cloths, gleaming polished silverware and candlelight. They were served wine, a sumptuous casserole made from crab caught fresh that morning in the Chesapeake Bay, and after dinner brandy. Spock delighted in the steamed Maryland corn, still on the cob and dripping sweet creamy butter. There was even a birthday cake, traditional with candles and sugary frosting.

The three men sat until late evening, relaxing, sharing good talk and good times. Before going to bed, Kirk insisted that they stroll around the main deck. They all thrilled to the awesome sight of black water and sky, dotted by

the twinkling stars overhead, rimmed on three sides by the retreating lights of the shore and washed by the silvery reflection of the moon on the gentle ripples beneath them. Mindful of his position as Captain, Kirk made a final visit to the bridge. The crew on duty, grateful for any break in the rather dull routine of nightwatch, cheerfully explained the function of various antique instruments to their starfaring leader. Kirk noticed with some chagrin, and more than a little comfort, that there was an up-to-date backup system of computers in case of an emergency. The crew of this ENTERPRISE were no less efficient than that of his own ship. After formally turning command over to the Officer On Duty, Kirk went below to his own cabin to be lulled to sleep by the gentle roll of the waves as his clippership headed toward the open sea.

Morning was gray. A light mist was falling and Kirk awoke to the sound of splashing against the side of the boat. From the dull light which came through his porthole, the Admiral could make out the objects in his cabin as he became aware of his surroundings. The chronometer by his bed read 0800 hours and Kirk realized with a groan that he hadn't intended to sleep so late. Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, he started to rise when a gentle list pulled the deck away beneath him and he toppled backward against his mattress. His stomach also did a gentle list at the upset. Frowning at himself for being caught off-guard, Kirk lay where he had landed for a moment, then once more pushed upward to stand, this time more carefully. He was successful. Gaining his feet, he once more felt the deck beneath him tilt, but he was prepared for it and reached out to the nearby wall to steady himself. His stomach, however, was apparently not as prepared for it as his intellect and he felt it reflect the motion of the room. Swallowing down a queasy feeling, Kirk inched his way to the porthole and peered out. It was raining, the splashing sound caused by drops hitting against the side of the glass. The water was gray and choppy, but the ship seemed to be moving along without difficulty.

Carefully, Kirk dressed. The cabin was so small that there was barely any walking space and there was always something within easy reach to steady himself as he battled with the shifting floor while trying to put on his clothes. That task accomplished, he made his way to Spock's and McCoy's cabins. Receiving no response from either, he concluded that they were already up and about. Cautiously, he left the relative safety of the quarters and moved across the more open spaces of the lower deck. As he maneuvered toward the ladder to go above, several crewmen passed, greeting him cheerfully. Kirk marvelled at the ease and assurance with which they walked across the ever-tilting wood beneath them.

Determined, Kirk made it to the ladder without mishap and acting on force of will alone, managed to climb it without the appearance of difficulty. He emerged on the main deck, wishing his stomach would cease its persistent protest of his unstable surroundings.

The rain was moderately heavy and the deck was slick. Ahead, in the glass-enclosed bridge, Spock and McCoy stood with Jack Davis at the helm. Kirk maneuvered across and up the stairs, grateful when he reached his destination. As he opened the door, moving quickly to the dry interior, the three men turned.

"Ah, here's our Captain now." Davis smiled a greeting. "I hope you slept well." Kirk managed to return the look, but Spock moved quickly toward him, offering assistance in closing the door against the rising wind.

"It seems we're experiencing some rather inclement weather this morning."

"It seems." Kirk nodded, glad to be indoors for the moment.

"You sure you slept okay, Jim?" McCoy was watching him closely. "You look a little peaked this morning."

"I slept fine, and what I look is wet, Doctor." The ship listed and Kirk reached out to gain his balance. He made contact with Spock's arm and the Vulcan grabbed on to steady them both. Davis caught the action and grinned.

"Takes a bit to get your sea legs, Admiral. I imagine it's quite different than sailing out in space."

"It is that, Mister Davis." Kirk returned the grin, casually letting go of Spock's arm.

"We'll be coming into open sea very soon now and we should leave this rain behind. Wind's picking up and we'll be able to set the sails." It was obvious Davis knew his business.

McCoy crossed over to his two friends. "We've been waiting for you to have breakfast, Jim. Why don't we go below now?"

"Good idea, Doctor McCoy," Davis agreed. "'Bout the time you're finished, we'll be ready with the sails and I know that's a sight you space gentlemen won't want to miss."

Kirk smiled a weak agreement. Breakfast was not on his list of priorities, and he wasn't at all certain how his stomach would react to food. Still, he wasn't excited about the idea of McCoy's questions should he refuse to eat.

Getting below was less difficult than going up had been and the three men made their way together across the unstable deck and down the ladder. Like the evening before, the table in the officer's mess was set with white linen and gleaming silverware. The aroma of bacon and fresh-baked bread met them as soon as they approached. Kirk's stomach did a lurch out of synch with that of the rolling ship and he knew at once that there was no way he was going to be able to force down a heavy meal. He wasn't even sure that a weak cup of tea would have much appeal. Swallowing back the nausea that rose in his throat, he made a gallant effort to be seated at the table. Neither Spock nor McCoy seemed to

notice his difficulty and he was grateful that their attention was on the elegantly appointed table.

Just as Kirk managed to relax into the Captain's chair, a steward arrived at his elbow. From a silver server, he poured a hot steaming cup of freshly brewed coffee, its pungent aroma instantly assailing Kirk's nostrils. The noble facade was over. Panic gripped the Admiral as his eyes frantically searched for the nearest exit. Not daring to take a breath, he remembered that the head was just off to his left. With quick deliberate movements, he rose from his seat and made his way in that direction. The conditioning of command gave him the control he needed until he was free at last to empty the contents of his stomach in private. Since he had eaten no solid food since arising, he was consumed by the retching of bitter yellow bile and painful dry heaves. It was only moments before McCoy was there, his arms around the quaking shoulders, his voice gentle and sympathetic.

"Easy, boy. Take it easy...the common term for it is seasickness. Has to do with the ground beneath your feet being somewhat rocky." Kirk managed to take a breath as the retching subsided.

"That's it, breathe deep," McCoy instructed. Now...now again. Feelin' any better?" Mutely, Kirk tried to acknowledge that the immediacy of the attack seemed less. "Good. You should have told me that you were having trouble. I can give you something for it."

Kirk rolled his eyes. "I didn't know I was. It kind of hit all of a sudden."

"Uh huh, when you smelled the food." McCoy handed him a towel. "Well, wash your face and come on out. I've got some pills which should help and I want you to eat something light. Getting something in your stomach should make you feel better. Now I've got to go and tell Spock you're all right. When you bolted from the table, he looked almost as stricken as you did."

McCoy's pills worked their magic and after a few plain crackers and a cup of tea, Kirk's condition was definitely improved. Grateful for his friend's medicinal skills, Kirk once more headed topside with Spock and McCoy to witness the setting of the ship's beautiful white sails. As Davis had predicted, the sun had come out and a breeze was beginning to pick up as the clippership headed for the Atlantic Ocean.

The men who worked the sails were more than proficient at their jobs. Their movements were as choreographed as those of a ballet and each step had a purpose. At last, all the white canvas was unfurled and the sailingship ENTERPRISE took her first breath of the salt air breeze. Her lungs expanded to their fullness, capturing the power of the wind and using it to propel the mighty vessel as they had her forbearers for centuries.

Standing at the helm of his own tall ship, Kirk drew in his breath, tasting the salt air. A United Federation of Planets flag was hoisted to the top mast and beneath it was Kirk's own personal flag, designed for this voyage by an artist of Spock's choosing. It was a deep-red triangle with Kirk's gold command insignia from his starship emblazoned in the center. Davis motioned for Kirk to take the helm, standing back to give instructions as Kirk confidently took possession of the magnificent, wooden wheel.

For an hour they sliced through the waves, Kirk enjoying the play of the ship, learning to steady its inclination to pull one way or the other as he pitted his skill and strength against the wind and water. The early morning's misadventure seemed to have abated and he felt assured that all he had needed was to become acclimated to the yaw and pitch of the boat.

The day wore on quickly: the sun began to fade - too early for evening - and grey clouds once more rolled in. The breeze picked up and the vessel gained speed, rocking with the rise and swell of the waves. Kirk had been away from the helm for awhile, having turned it back over to Mr. Davis, and was touring the ship with Spock and McCoy, inspecting each area his crew proudly presented. He felt the queasiness in his stomach begin again and his head began to throb. He fought it back as long as he could, but with each shift of the deck it grew worse. McCoy turned to look at him, saw the ashen face and knew.

"C'mon, Jim. Let's go back to your cabin. I think you need to lie down."

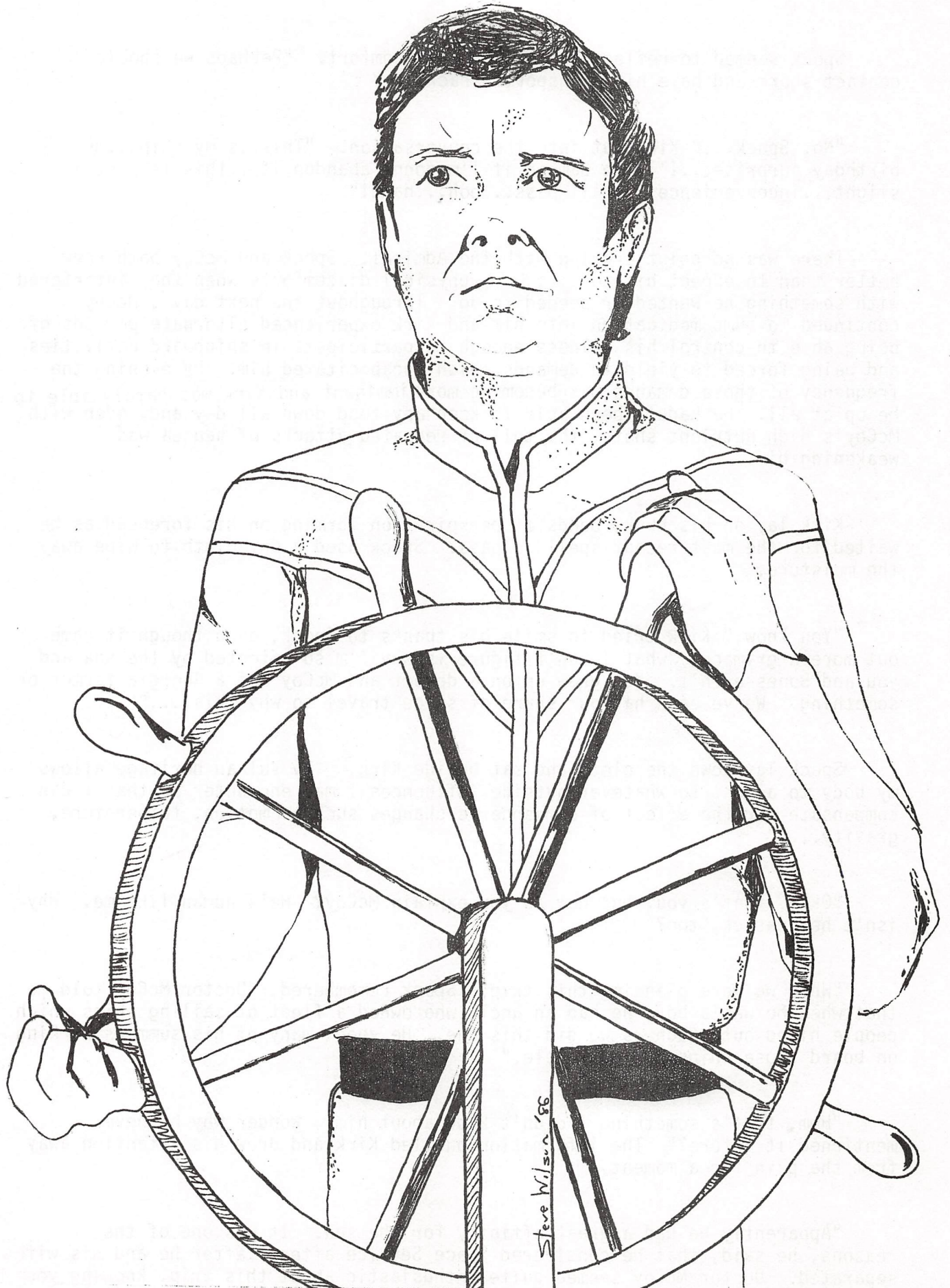
Kirk began to protest but thought better of it. He fervently hoped he would make it to his cabin. With Spock's steadying hand under his arm, he just barely managed.

He was violently ill again, his stomach giving a great performance of turning itself inside out. His head pounded to the rhythm of the waves; there seemed to be no stability anywhere on the ship and the constant motion was relentless. With Spock's aid, he managed to get into his bunk and McCoy pressed a hypo against his arm. Still the ship continued to roll and each movement brought fresh waves of nausea.

"Try to focus on something stable, Jim, and take deep breaths." McCoy could see his medication was having little effect.

Kirk tried. He fixed his eyes on the wall. It moved. He looked at the desk. It rolled. "It's no use, Bones. There's nothing still in this room."

McCoy glanced over at Spock. "The motion is exaggerated for him. Every slight movement is intensified because he's so sick. I wish there was something more I could do, but unless he's on solid ground, I don't think anything else will help much if the medicine isn't having any effect...."



Spock seemed to reflect his friend's discomfort. "Perhaps we should contact shore and have him transported back...."

"No, Spock..." Kirk cut into the conversation. "This is my ship...my birthday surprise...I'll be damned if I'm gonna abandon it...this is just a slight...inconvenience...it'll pass...ooh...damn!"

There was no point arguing with the Admiral. Spock and McCoy both knew better than to expect him to give in to physical discomforts when they interfered with something he wanted or needed to do. Throughout the next day, McCoy continued to pump medication into him and Kirk experienced alternate periods of being able to control his illness enough to participate in shipboard activities and being forced to yield to demands which incapacitated him. By evening the frequency of those demands was becoming more imminent and Kirk was hardly able to be up at all. He hadn't been able to keep any food down all day and, even with McCoy's high nutrient shots, the toll of repeated attacks of nausea was weakening him.

Kirk lay on his bunk, beads of perspiration forming on his forehead as he waited for the most recent spell to pass. Spock used a dry cloth to wipe away the moisture.

"You know," Kirk tried to smile his thanks to Spock, even though it came out more a grimace, "what I can't figure is why I'm so affected by the sea and you and Bones aren't. You grew up on a desert and McCoy was a Georgia farmer or something. We've each had our share of space travel so why this...."

Spock lay down the cloth and sat beside Kirk. "My Vulcan heritage allows my body to adjust to whatever outside influences I may encounter so that I can compensate for the effect of atmospheric changes such as motion, temperature, gravity...."

"Okay, that's you, but how do you explain McCoy? He's human like me. Why isn't he seasick, too?"

"When we were planning this trip," Spock remembered, "Doctor McCoy told me that when he was a boy, he had an uncle who owned a fleet of sailing ships which people hired out, much as we did this one. He spent many of his summers working on board those ships for his uncle."

"Hmm, that's something I didn't know about him. Wonder why he never mentioned it before?" The information puzzled Kirk and drew his attention away from the pain for a moment.

"Apparently he had a great affinity for the sea. It was one of the reasons, he said, that he considered Space Service after...after he and his wife separated. Doctor McCoy seemed quite enthusiastic about this trip, knowing you

would enjoy it but also looking forward to it himself."

"I think you're right." Kirk took a deep breath and tried to shift to a more comfortable position. "He's off somewhere now...exploring the ship...." Kirk's voice became clipped; the movement had been a mistake. Waves of nausea and pain engulfed him and his face went white, slicked with a fresh outbreak of perspiration. He clutched at his stomach, drawing up his knees." Oooh...oh, damn...hurts...."

Spock grabbed for the cloth again, patting away the wetness on the other man's forehead. He rubbed his shoulders and arms, trying to ease the tension, as Kirk pulled himself into a tight ball as a defense against the attack. "Relax, Jim. Try to relax. Go with the pain, don't fight it. You're too tense...I know it's hard."

Kirk tried to comply. He leaned into Spock's soothing motions, concentrating on their comforting sensation. He willed himself not to give credence to the enemy inside his gut, but his adversary was too strong. In spite of his determined attempt, his body convulsed with great energy draining heaves. His stomach was empty, so there was no release. The heaving continued until he was exhausted and still it did not abate. Spock held onto him, feeling his body shudder, too tired to take any more abuse.

Finally it was over and Kirk lay spent against Spock. His chest rose and fell as he weakly gulped in air, trying to catch his breath. Spock sat with him until he calmed, until his breathing became more regular. As the Vulcan held him, he was aware of an intense heat radiating from the Human body. Kirk usually felt cool to Spock's normally higher skin temperature. Now, however, his body was hot to the touch.

"Jim, you're unusually hot." Spock pressed his hands against the dry flesh of Kirk's neck and arms. The wetness from the perspiration was gone.

"Yeah...I...I feel a little warm...outside...but,...cold Spock, cold from within...." Kirk shuddered, suddenly aware of the dichotomy of chills and fever.

Spock eased him back to a flat position on the bed, straightening his pillow and pulling the blankets up over him. "I'm going to find McCoy. I do not believe that these are symptoms of seasickness."

Kirk nodded as he hunched down, drawing the blankets tight against the shivering going on inside.

McCoy straightened and checked the readings on his mediscanner again. On the bed, Kirk felt so miserable, he almost didn't care what they showed. There

was a battle being waged inside him that was jabbing his stomach with red-hot swords while turning his blood to ice-water.

"This is definitely not just seasickness," McCoy finally announced, "but the early symptoms were so similar that it was misleading."

"Then what is it?" Spock tried not to hover, but he knew his concern was apparent.

"I want to run a few simple tests and then I'll know for certain, but it appears to be a virulent strain of a rather unusual illness, commonly called Dallas Fever."

"After the city in the southwest?" Spock wanted to know.

"No, actually, it was named for Doctor Victor Dallas, the noted physician who isolated the strain." He looked down at the bed. "Jim, Dallas Fever is fairly easy to cure; the problem often is diagnosing it. The early symptoms are severe nausea, headache, loss of balance and an aversion to any kind of motion. The fever and chills don't manifest until later; but on your first major sea voyage, you can see how the illness might easily be mistaken for seasickness."

"Bones, spare me the explanation. Can you give me something to take care of it?"

McCoy touched his shoulder, his voice softening. "Hold on a little longer, Jim. I've got to run some tests on your blood samples to confirm my suspicions and, if they're positive, I'll have to contact a hospital to have the drug sent out. I think it will be more expedient that way than trying to get you back to shore, but we're still looking at several hours before we can begin any kind of treatment. Think you can ride it out til then?"

Kirk groaned at McCoy's choice of words and tried for a little levity. "Oooh, right now I don't want to 'ride' anything, but I don't seem to have a choice."

McCoy smiled. "That's the spirit, Admiral. Trust me. I'll try to have you back on your feet as soon as possible."

The tests confirmed McCoy's diagnosis and, with Captain Davis' assistance, he was able to contact a hospital to have his prescription sent out to the ship. It was pre-dawn, however, before he was able to administer the first injection of the drug which would hopefully bring about a rapid recovery.

After taking the medicine, Kirk fell into his first restful sleep in two days. By noon his fever was gone and, when he awoke, he realized that he was grateful for the expertise of the man who had been his friend for so many years. That reminded him of something.

"You know, when I thought that what I had was seasickness, I questioned why you and Spock weren't affected. Spock explained how he can adapt his body to changes, but he told me that you used to work on sailing vessels when you were a kid."

McCoy nodded. "Yeah, that's true."

Kirk was puzzled. "In all the years we've been friends, you never mentioned that to me."

"No, I guess I didn't." McCoy was not going to volunteer anything. Kirk was going to have to ask.

"Well, that seems strange considering how many times I've talked about wanting to sail. Was there a reason for your deliberately avoiding it?"

McCoy sat down on Kirk's bunk, knowing he'd have to explain and not wanting to, yet somehow feeling a sense of relief to be finally talking about it. "It isn't any big secret. When Arrianna and I were married, we had a boat. Spent our honeymoon on her. The Sea Princess. I used to call Arrianna that too. There were so many happy times aboard that boat. Then when the marriage went sour, so did many of the things which were reminders of those days.

"When I joined Starfleet, I sold the Sea Princess. It was like losing the final connection with the life we'd had. I decided to sail the stars instead of the oceans. It was a long time ago...."

Kirk had no reply. He understood what it must have cost McCoy to plan this sailing surprise for him. Then, once again, he had also come through and saved his life. The measure of friendship...Kirk met the clear blue eyes, so familiar, so trustworthy....

McCoy reached out and patted his hand. Now, Admiral, enough talk. I've got to send for your food and get you back in command of your vessel. And I'll try to locate that Vulcan. Haven't seen him in a while. Hope he hasn't fallen overboard."

Kirk shook his head. "McCoy, you're the proverbial Mother Hen." McCoy started out the door. "Two eggs, bacon, a couple of those fresh biscuits, some

orange marmalade, a pot of coffee, maybe a stack of hot cakes...."

The Doctor turned. "A bowl of nourishing hot oatmeal, glass of juice, one slice of plain toast and a cup of tea."

"I take that back. You're not a Mother Hen. You're a sadist."

"I love you, too." McCoy closed the door, disappearing.

Kirk leaned back against his pillow and smiled. "I know you do, Bones," he whispered to no one.

Spock was loitering outside Kirk's cabin when the Admiral emerged an hour later, comfortably full from his nourishing breakfast and freshly dressed, ready to resume command of the ENTERPRISE.

"Captain Davis is waiting on the bridge for you. I've informed him that you would be there shortly. It is a clear, breezy day and the navigator reports that we are making excellent speed."

Kirk beamed. "Thank you, Mister Spock. Let's go." On the way, Kirk marvelled at how easy it was to keep his balance in spite of the rocking deck. Amazing what being in good health could do. He paused at the ladder. "You know, it's nice to know that I wasn't just seasick. On top of everything else, it was a little embarrassing to think that I couldn't sail without my stomach protesting."

"I'm pleased that you were able to recover so completely whatever the ailment." Relief showed in Spock's voice. "However, I'm...sorry...sorry that you had to be ill at all."

Kirk was about to reply that he was sorry about it too, when he realized that there was something peculiar in Spock's tone. He gazed at his friend intently for a moment, remembering. Since McCoy's diagnosis and his first administration of the cure, Spock had been strangely absent from his side.

He recalled Spock being with him when he had been so sick and feverish, holding him against the wracking heaves, sponging him with cool water. Spock had been there, gentle, caring, while they had waited for McCoy's test results and for the drug to arrive. Then he had gone to sleep and Spock had disappeared. It had been McCoy who had been there each time he woke. In fact he had not seen Spock until just a few minutes earlier when he had met him outside his cabin. Kirk was aware now that Spock's words had been unusually formal - no inquiries about his recovery until he, himself, had mentioned it.

Even now, there seemed to be something more that Spock was trying to say.

Kirk turned to his friend. "All right. I know you well enough to see that something's bothering you. Are you going to tell me what it is, or do I have to spend the rest of the day speculating?"

Spock hesitated, about to make a denial. He lowered his gaze, certain that if he were not candid with Kirk, the man would not rest until he learned the truth. Yet he was also certain that if he admitted what was bothering him, the Admiral would dismiss it as overreacting and foolish. He could feel Kirk's gaze on him, waiting for an answer. "Doctor McCoy told me about the nature of your illness." The statement explained nothing.

Kirk nodded. "Yeah, he told me about it, too. Seems I was a prime candidate."

Spock sighed, hedging would be to no avail. "He said that most victims with your personality traits contract the disease while they are on a vacation or holiday. It has to do with the pressure of their lifestyles keeping the parasite dormant until they relax."

"Uh, huh, that's the way he explained it to me too." Kirk still could not see what this information had to do with Spock being upset, but his friend was clearly agitated about something. He waited for Spock to go on.

"Don't you see: if we hadn't planned this trip for you, if you hadn't come, you might never have gotten sick." Spock had apparently been dwelling on this for some time.

"Well, Mister Spock, that's true." Kirk knew his reaction had to be the right one or Spock would spend the rest of the trip blaming himself. "But then I wouldn't have had the opportunity to command my own clippership, as I'm planning to do right now, if and when we get to the bridge."

Spock looked chagrined. "I did not mean to delay you."

"Good. I'm glad to hear that."

Spock turned to move away so that Kirk could climb the ladder. Instead, Kirk caught him by the arm. "Spock, look at me." He waited for their eyes to meet. "I know you think you have a reason to feel responsible for my illness and I don't want to disregard your feelings, even though I don't agree with them. But you've got to believe that whatever happened - whatever still could happen - I wouldn't trade this trip for anything else I've done." Kirk smiled, seeing the grim Vulcan features soften. "The ship is beautiful, the weather's beautiful, and the friendship we share - you, me and McCoy - that's the most

beautiful of all. Even without all the rest of the trimmings, I guess I've been made to appreciate that all over again. It's something I - we - don't say very often. I guess most of the time we don't even think about it. But it's there, Spock. It's always there. And sometimes it's really nice just to be reminded of it."

Spock smiled. "I...I suppose I forgot that as well."

Kirk shook his head. "No, you never forget it. You just don't say it."

Spock looked confused. "Should I?"

"Of course not. I wouldn't know what to do with a sentimental Vulcan." He was teasing and Spock picked up the mood.

"Or I with a ...'gushy' Human."

Kirk laughed. "Gushy? What kind of word is that from a former science officer?"

"The kind of word one acquires from too much Human contamination."

Kirk tried to look insulted. "Oh, now I'm contaminating you, am I? Mister Spock, you haven't begun to see what I can do when I really try."

"I am certain I will soon." Spock was resigned.

"I'm going to the bridge." Kirk started to climb the ladder. "Well, are you going to follow me?"

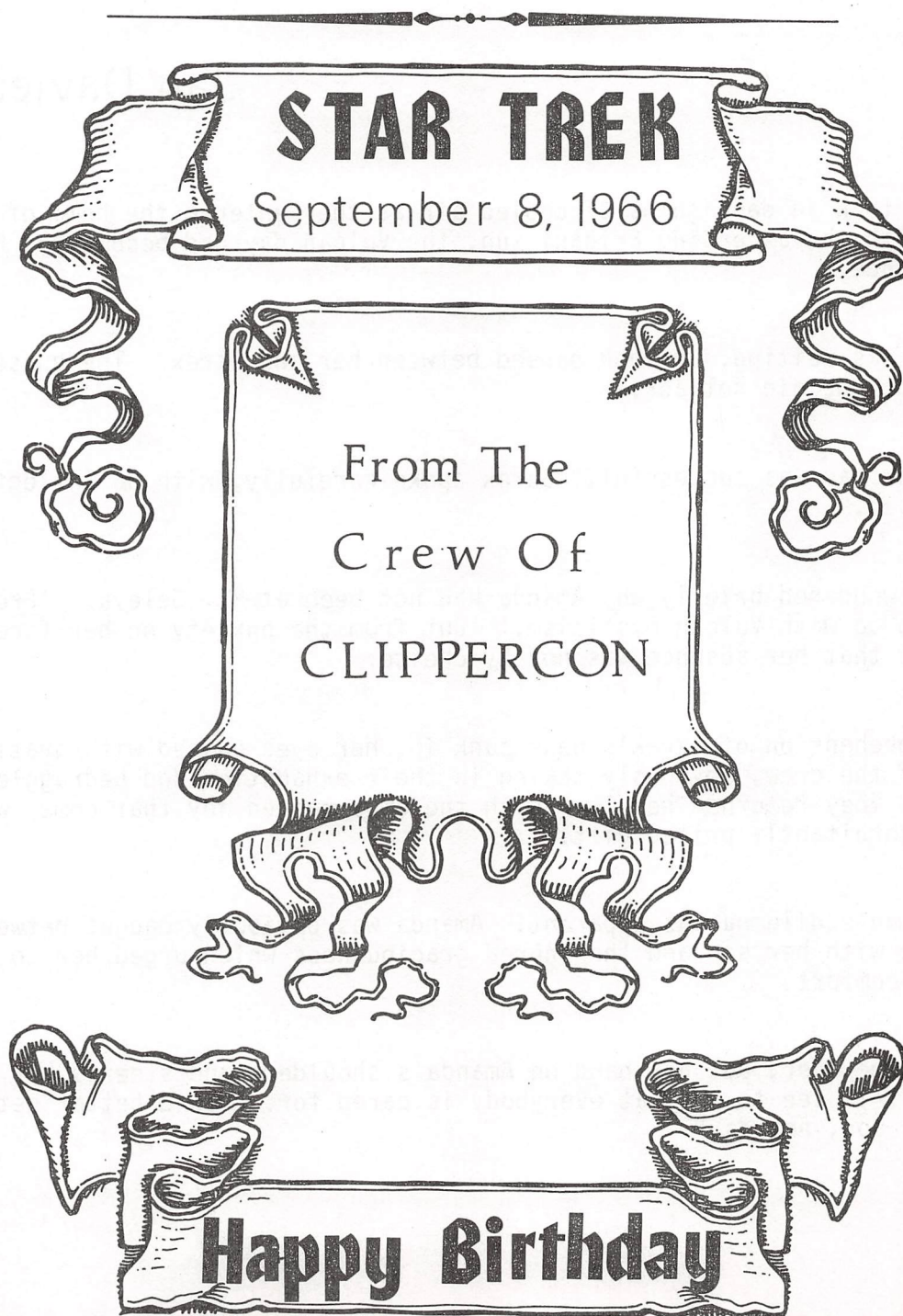
Spock nodded. "Always, Admiral, always."

At the wheel of the Clippership ENTERPRISE, Kirk could feel the wind at his back. He looked up at the late night sky, the stars twinkling. His gaze fell on one shining the brightest. 'And a star to steer her by.' As the breeze caught the snowy sails, they swelled, straining to move the ship forward. Kirk could feel the deck beneath his feet, its gentle roll evidence of the elements of wind and water.

Two friends lounged at his side, as confident of his ability to command this seafaring ship as his own space vessel, ENTERPRISE. He thought of her -

that giant starship he had called home for so long. She had given him dreams and adventures, prestige and challenge. He had sometimes wondered if he commanded her or she, him. Yet perhaps most important of all, she had given him Spock and McCoy and friendships to last a lifetime.

ENTERPRISE was indeed a 'tall ship', too and he had a spaceful of stars to steer her by. And if he couldn't always 'feel the wind at his back', he could see the friends at his side. That, after all, was the best of both worlds....





Jan Davies

Scotty took in deep gulps of cooled air as they entered the home of Spock's parents. With the ascending Eridani sun, the Vulcan day had become too hot for Human tolerance.

Amanda was waiting. A look passed between her and Sarek. The question lingered, but she did not ask.

"Fal tor pan was successful," Sarek spoke carefully, with no inflection. "Our son lives."

Scotty wondered briefly why Amanda had not been at Mt. Seleya. 'Probably something to do with Vulcan mysticism.' But from the anxiety on her face, he had no doubt that her absence was not by choice.

As comprehension of Sarek's news sank in, her eyes passed with gratitude over each of the crew, obviously taking in their exhaustion and bedraggled appearance. They returned her look with the embarrassed joy that comes with giving an exorbitantly priced gift.

The woman's dilemma was apparent. Amanda was obviously caught between a desire to be with her son and the inbred graciousness which urged her to see to her guest's comfort.

Uhura came over, put her hand on Amanda's shoulders and steered her toward the door. "I'll see to it that everybody is cared for. You'd better get over and see your son, Amanda."

After Sarek and Amanda had gone, the hum of conversation resumed. The spirit of camaraderie permeated the air, and as was true with any successful team, there was an irresistible urge to replay the more outstanding moves.

"You should have seen his face..."

"...took care of Mr. Adventure..."

"...fruity as a nutcake. And he didn't even catch it...."

Scotty found himself feeling detached; as if he were an observer rather than a participant. He continued to smile, but soon became conscious of the ache of facial muscles that comes from forcing it. 'Why? Spock is my friend. I should feel as happy as the others. We never would have gotten out of space dock if it weren't for me. I did some of my fanciest work bolixing up the Excelsior.'

Yet there was no way he could call up a sense of euphoria to match that of the others.

Determined not to let his melancholy infect the others, he drew Uhura aside, quietly. "Can you show me where my room is, Lass? It's a wee bit past me bedtime."

Wisps of excited conversation followed them down the hallway.

"...sure he recognized me..."

"...still say I'd rather donate a kidney...."

"...when that eyebrow went up, I knew we had our Mr. Spock back...."

He shut the door softly, cutting off the voices. He had probably just run out of energy a little sooner than the others.

McCoy was the last one to awaken that afternoon. Perhaps the experience had taken its hardest toll on him. He had been the one to hold the Katra and though he had not been able to integrate it successfully into his own being, it had not been a comfortable experience to have had it wrenched out of him.

The Doctor had dressed and entered the outer rooms, following the sounds of murmured voices. The three women were chatting together happily. Uhura and Amanda had had time to get to know each other over the last week. Apparently

they still had a lot to talk about.

For the first time since McCoy had known her, Saavik seemed to have let down her guard. The warmth of Amanda had taken her in and finally the young woman without a planet appeared to have a home.

There was food on the dining room table and Sulu was helping himself as McCoy came in. He looked up. "Hi, Doctor McCoy. Hungry?"

"Ravenous." McCoy poured himself a drink. He sat down facing the helmsman. "Any idea of what these sandwiches are filled with?"

"Some kind of vegetable pate'. Vulcan has a much greater variety of edible plants than Earth. That's probably made it easier for them to give up meat."

"Probably," the Doctor looked around absently. "Where are the others?"

"Sarek is showing Chekov his library. He has a large collection of Russian literature Chekov was anxious to see. And the Admiral's taking a shower. He should be out soon."

"And Scotty?" he said looking around for the engineer.

"He went back to his room."

McCoy wandered away from Sulu, admiring the home that somehow managed to blend the Vulcan and the Terran. Vulcan designs needlepointed by a Human hand, paintings signed by a Vulcan, showing azure skies.

The Doctor drifted back to the sleeping quarters. He found Scotty's designated room and tapped gently on the door.

"Come in."

Scott was sitting on the bed staring absently at a small object he held in his hands. He looked up almost guiltily, then smiled. "Been up long, Leonard?"

"No. Not very long." McCoy eased himself into the chair facing the bed. "There are some sandwiches in the other room. Have you eaten yet?"

"Not yet. I have na' really felt much like eatin' since this whole scheme began." He gave a weak chuckle. "I think I must've left me stomach on Earth."

"Well, you should eat something soon. Those are doctor's orders." The irony of the friendly warning echoed between them. At best, McCoy's medical authority was in a dubious state of limbo.

The Doctor studied his friend. It seemed like weeks since he'd had a chance to examine Scott and that had been after a brief bout of 'shore leave'. Even then Scotty hadn't looked this worn out. Odd. Was this the man who could drink a Kelvan under the table? Had all those years of hard living suddenly caught up with him?

The Doctor's instincts told him something was out of kilter, and under normal circumstances he would have ordered the engineer to sickbay for a complete physical.

He suddenly felt frustrated and helpless in this alien place. "Well, I guess I'll see how the others are doing." Scotty made no move to join him as he went back to the other room.

Kirk was in the living area, dressed in Vulcan clothing, hair wet and slicked back. He was studying some of the photos on the wall and seemed particularly intrigued by one of Spock as an adolescent. He turned to McCoy. "I saw him like that. He aged as I held him."

The Doctor shared his sense of wonder, "I think we've all experienced a lifetime's worth of biological miracles this week. "

He cleared his throat. "Well, Jim, since you're still the recognized leader of 'whatever outfit we're serving in', I'd like you to see about retrieving my medical instruments. They took them away while I was under observation."

Misunderstanding McCoy's look of concern, Kirk protested, "It's only a few scrapes and bruises, Bones."

McCoy smiled. "It wasn't you I was concerned about this time. Though now that you mention it...." He started to visually examine the cut on Kirk's forehead, using his hand to push back the hair that had already begun to curl as it dried. "Hmm. Pupils okay. No sign of concussion. Any dizzy spells?"

"Wait a minute," Kirk brushed the Doctor's hands away. "Who are you worried about? Is it Spock? Don't you think the Vulcan healers...."

"Not Spock. If they can't fix him, I certainly can't. No, I was just talking to Scotty a few minutes ago. He was just sitting in his room sorta

staring at nothing. These past few days have taken their toll on all of us, but Jim, he looks like he's aged ten years overnight."

"I'll talk to him. Meanwhile, why don't you get something to eat. You're thin as a rail."

"I already ate," McCoy answered drily.

"Well, eat again. You've lost too much weight and I don't like my crew to have a 'lean and hungry' look."

"All right 'Caesar'," he answered agreeably, pleased that Kirk had comfortably fallen into his command mode.

The door to Scott's room was not quite shut all the way. Kirk brushed against it and it swung inward slightly, so that he could see Scotty sitting on the bed quietly, unaware of any audience.

He stared at the still form silently and thought, 'Bones was right. How could I have overlooked it?'

Kirk had always prided himself on how closely attuned he was to his senior officers. But with all that had happened in such a brief time - and his first concern lately had been Spock. An onus had been placed on him by Sarek and his own conscience - 'The needs of the one outweighed the needs of the many.' His crew had understood and had reflected their acceptance when he had answered Spock.

That responsibility had been fulfilled. He would have liked to have basked in the euphoria of finding his friend alive, to shut out everything else for awhile. But now the rest of the crew took priority. They had risked their lives, and their careers, and he needed to help them deal with that.

Sitting on the bed was a man who seemed sculpted of sorrow and defeat. While the others had been tired, they had all reflected the victory of their success at bringing Spock home - and he knew Scotty had cared for Spock too.

Could the engineer be regretting what he had done to his career? No, that couldn't be it. This was the man who had light-heartedly jimmied the Excelsior's transwarp drive and thrown in his lot with Kirk's renegade crew.

"Are you busy, Scotty?" Kirk asked gently as he eased through the door.

Scott looked up in faint surprise and the look of distracted sorrow was quickly replaced by a forced smile. "Jim." He gestured expansively toward the room.

'My God!' Kirk thought. 'He's trying to hide his grief from me. Are they all doing that? Trying to protect me from their unhappiness; their fear of what this all has cost them?' He sat in the chair facing Scotty.

"Hot outside," Scott commented.

"Good thing this house has been adapted for Humans. It isn't even their hottest season," Kirk added. 'Have we been reduced to talking about the weather? I've got to be able to do better.'

While they talked, Scotty seemed to be absently fingering something. Occasionally, light would glance off the object, making Kirk aware that the unknown article was metallic. The engineer's large hands all but obscured it, and Kirk was about to ask what it was, but the question died on his lips as Scotty brought up the subject foremost on Kirk's mind. "Think Starfleet will ever let us out of the brig?" His tone was light, as casual as his comment about the weather.

"They've got to get hold of us first," Kirk replied wickedly.

Scott looked at him in surprise. "Do you think we should stay here?"

"Sarek already told me Vulcan will grant us amnesty. If we want."

"Well, maybe. Better'n a prison colony on one of Saturn's moons."

Kirk leaned forward and clasped the older man on the shoulder. "Scotty, there's no way in the galaxy you're going to a prison colony. I guarantee it."

"I know." He spoke impassively. Clearly it wasn't fear of prison or loss of career that troubled him. There was always a place for a brilliant engineer, and the Vulcan Institute of Technology would welcome someone with Scott's credentials.

Then what was wrong? Perhaps it was the loss of young Peter Preston. Now that the danger of Khan and Kruge was over, the realization of his nephew's death had most likely caught up with him at last.

Though he had liked the brash young 'tiger' immediately, Kirk had not had a chance to know the cadet well. He was uneasy approaching the subject. 'Because

of the guilt? If I hadn't been so damned trusting of the Reliant, had acted sooner, that young man might be alive today. God, I've hurt so many people; destroyed so many lives... Got to face a lot of people, not the least of which is Carol....'

Unconsciously, he braced his shoulders as if expecting a blow. "Scotty, I know you must be brokenhearted over Peter."

Scott raised his head and dark brown eyes, disoriented with grief and confusion met his. "I was always partial to him of all my nieces and nephews. I know ye shouldna' play favorites, but he seemed to take after me more than the others, likin' engines and such." His hands continued to play with the metal object as if it were a living thing.

"I'm sorry, Scotty." It was all he could say.

Kirk had prepared himself to face Scott's self pity, depression, perhaps anger. What he did not expect was the man's sympathy for him. "I know it's that much worse for you - losin' your son an' all."

Kirk didn't really want to talk about David, not yet. David's death was like an aching tooth. He kept pushing it to the back of his mind, trying to ignore it, knowing full well that the pain would be that much worse when he finally did face it.

'Not now. Just a little more time to rejoice in finding Spock.'

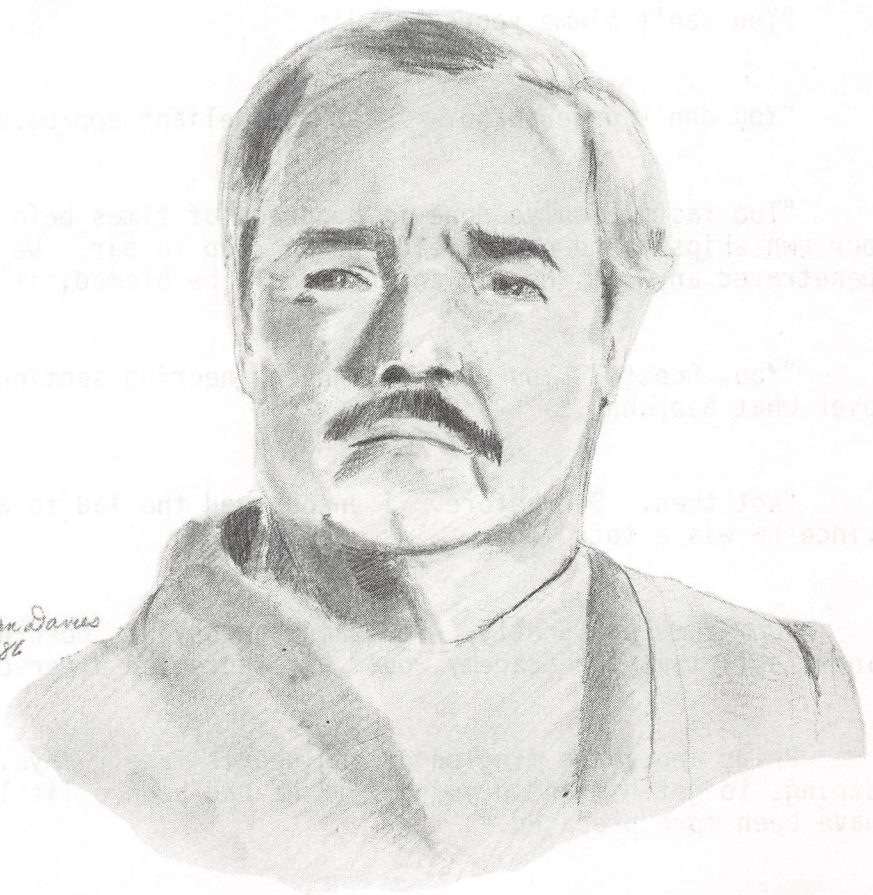
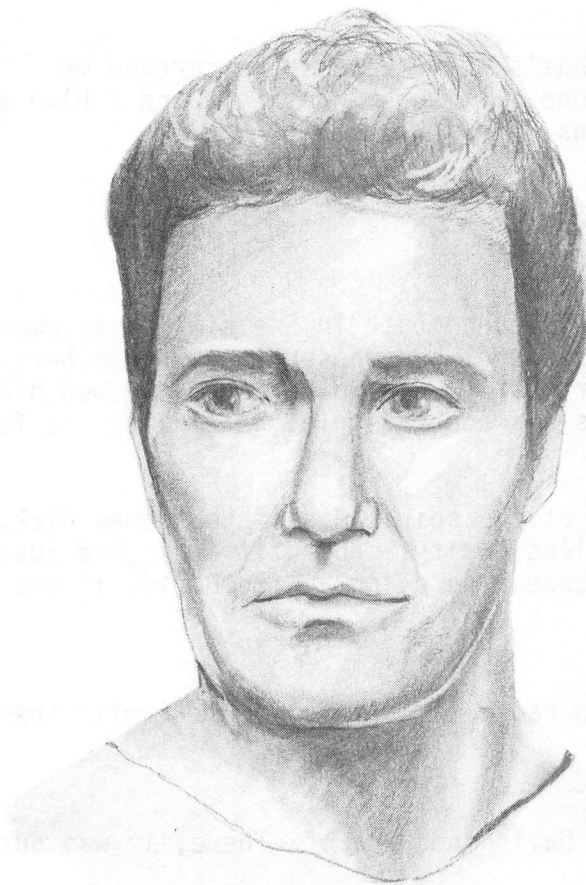
"Scotty, I hardly even had time to know him as a son before I lost him. You were probably much closer to your nephew than I was to David."

Scott looked at him with age old recognition. "Aye. It hurts all the more because of that."

Kirk drew his hand across his brow, suddenly feeling exhausted again. "There's an...emptiness...as though I'd lost something I never had..." If I had raised him, had seen him growing up, maybe I would have been prepared in a way.

"But this young man...I saw him only a few times when he was very young....I've known crew members better. My proteges. Young men and women developing as officers and adults. I've seen them die and it hurt...it always hurts. But not like this."

Scott nodded knowingly. "It's different with kin."



Kirk stared at him. "You think that's why. Because he carried my chromosomes? Well, he's not the only one, I'm sure. Both you and I have made our share of donations for the gene bank."

"'Tis not the same. He was your son."

Kirk was silent, struck with the profound truth in the simple statement. David was his son. Not in name, because Carol had chosen to give him hers. Genetically, yes, but that was only part of it. David had acknowledged him as his father and he had accepted David as his son. Simple. A link to the future.

Not just a blood link, but a link of the spirit, as if he, James Kirk, was not an individual but a part of a timeless entity. An entity that had just been severed. "With the others, it was someone else dying. With David, it was part of me."

"Aye." Scott sighed. He had also had a major limb of his family tree amputated.

"I'm responsible for both deaths, David and Peter." There, it was out in the open.

"You can't blame yourself, Jim."

"You don't understand. I let the Reliant approach with our shields...."

"Too fast. You've done it hundreds of times before. Who shields against our own ships? And our shields weren't up to par. We could have likely been penetrated anyway. No, if anyone should be blamed, it should be me."

"You, Scotty? You were in the engineering section. You had no control over what happened."

"Not then. But before. I encouraged the lad to aspire to Starfleet ever since he was a tot."

"Oh, come on, Scotty. You said the boy was born with space fever. It was inevitable that the Academy would have accepted a person with his aptitude."

Pride and shame mingled on engineer's face. "Aye. But I pulled a few strings to get him in so young. If he had been a little older...maybe he would have been more prepared."

It was true. They both shared the guilt and loss.

Could they reconcile it? Kirk knew he could. He had lost those important to him before. His brother. The two women he had loved. The unborn child that had died with Miramanie.

Like a miser who had lost part of his fortune, he counted up what still remained. His stalwart crew who had followed him faithfully to hell. And Spock. Oh, he still had much left.

But what of the elderly engineer? He had no wife or children. And though he shared the camaraderie of their group, he had no one special friend among them. What was left? What was dear to Scott?

Scott continued to absently toy with the piece of metal. Kirk still couldn't get a good look at it, though the light from the bedroom window would glance off of it with bright whiteness.

The subject of Peter, David and family ties seemed to be exhausted for now. Idly he questioned Scott, "What's that?"

"What?" The engineer seemed unaware of what Kirk was referring to, until he followed Kirk's gaze to the object in his hands. "Oh," he said almost sheepishly, "it's the adapter valve leading into the warp engines."

"You took it off of the Excelsior?"

"No. I took it from the Enterprise when I was diverting energy from the life support systems on the lower decks. Thought it'd give the old girl a little extra kick."

It had been so obvious, yet he had overlooked it. Suddenly he knew exactly why Scott was grieving. Kirk looked at the metal piece almost enviously. "Then...that's all that's left of the ship?"

"Aye. A nonessential component."

"I loved her too, Scotty."

That did it. Scott's eyes suddenly filled with tears. He cleared his throat and stammered huskily, "It's ridiculous, isn't it? What kind of a man am I, Jim, to grieve over a piece of machinery. I mourn my nephew, but I swear, my heart is heavier with the loss of the ship." He swallowed. "When Peter died, I felt sad for my sister. I felt the loss of a young life that had held so much

promise.

"But when the Enterprise went - I felt as if my own life was over and I've just been marking time ever since.

"I know it's silly for a grown man to care so for mechanical equipment, but that's the way I've always been. Even as a tiny lad, while other children would carry a stuffed toy around with them, I would carry around one of the engines of me toy trains. It just felt right to have me hand on the cool metal."

"Scotty, if it's foolish for a grown man to love a ship, I'm just as foolish. I'd always known that I'd wanted to explore space, but before I took over the Enterprise, I never realized how a ship could captivate my heart." He looked away toward the window, reluctant to speak of it and yet needing to. "Sometimes I felt like she was talking to me. She was a jealous mistress. The only times I've ever been able to love a woman were when I was away from her."

"She was your ship, Jim. You and she kind of grew up together. It never felt right having Decker...steering her."

Kirk didn't even try to deny it. "When I saw her silver-white hull, her sleek lines - I knew I had to get her back.

"She was a real beauty. And her engines fit together so well. I knew every nut and bolt like I knew me own self."

Kirk teased. "Your 'wee bairns'."

Scotty grinned ruefully. It was something he only said when he was very emotional. "Well, the many times I've taken them apart, rebuilt them, nursed 'em back to health, 'tis no wonder I would come to think of 'em as me children. And I knew 'em better than anyone. Even Mr. Spock had to acknowledge that I was right about 'em when the computer said different."

"Well, it's no wonder you would. You made so many modifications, I doubt the original designers would have recognized her."

He grinned with pride. "Though sometimes we held those engines together with string and sealing wax. The times we had to limp home on impulse engines...." his voice trailed off.

"She always gave a little more than she had to."

Scotty stared at him. "I dinna think you were really going to do it. Even

as we fed in the code, I thought you had some trick up your sleeve."

"I could hardly believe it myself."

Long buried anger suddenly flared in brown eyes, "There must have been somethin' else you could have done...."

Kirk met the anticipated accusation with gentleness, "I had no choice, Scotty. I never had a choice. She was old, and they were going to take her apart anyway."

The anger died as quickly as it had come, and simmered into a soft sadness. "That would have hurt even more. To have other technicians dismantle her, with no care for what she was." His voice was still rough with pain. "I know you loved her as much as I did, Jim. And those other times we came within seconds of blowing her up before...I never questioned that you were doing the right thing. But I always thought that I would be with her if she went that way."

Kirk didn't answer right away. Though he had loved the Enterprise, he could not match Scott's sentiment. He recognized a fundamental difference between them. People would always come first with him. With the shadow of David's death and uncertainties about Spock's future hanging over him, he could not completely emphasize with the Enterprise.

But however different they were, Scotty's grief was very real, and he had to give whatever comfort he could. Kirk spoke slowly, "You and I have always felt that the Enterprise was something more than a machine. Maybe we're a couple of fools. But maybe there really is something...more."

What blew up was a machine. The parts were always changing. Just like the human body has a complete changover of cells every seven years or so. And Mr. Spock is entirely made up of regenerated cells. Only the pattern in the DNA is the same.

"If that's true for a person, it should be true for the ship. It doesn't have to be exactly the same. People change. The Enterprise was constantly being revamped. But we still have the original pattern - and some of the cells," he said, indicating the piece Scotty was still holding.

Scott stared at him in awe. "Yer not proposin' that we rebuild a starship, are ye?"

"I don't know exactly what form it will take, Scotty, but there's something of the Enterprise left, a part of her spirit, that the people who loved her are holding on to until she's ready to fly again."

Scotty smiled. "You mean, like Doctor McCoy was carrying around in his head for Mr. Spock."

"Exactly."

Half believing it, Scotty began, "Well, if they could put Mr. Spock back together..."

"And you do have your reputation as a 'miracle worker' to uphold."

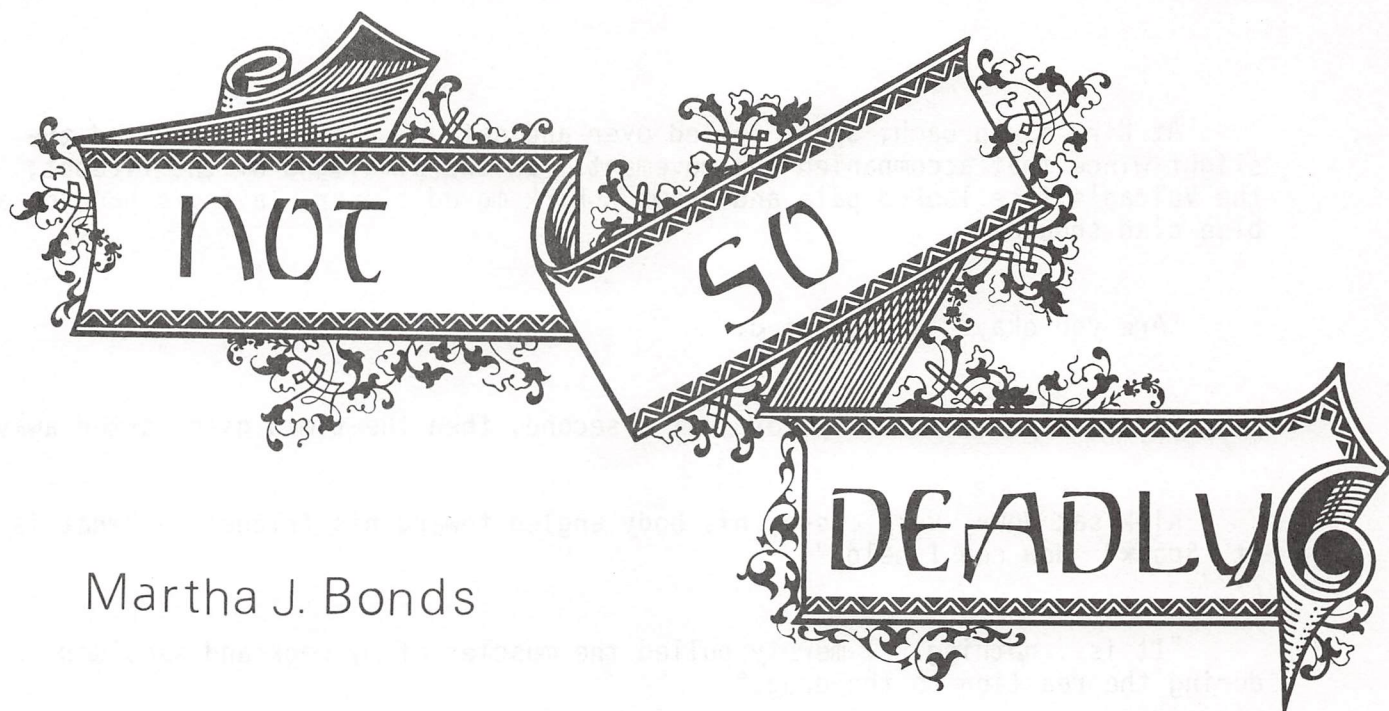
Scotty said wryly, "Even miracle workers have limits. What am I going to do for parts?"

As he was convincing Scotty, he found he was starting to believe in the dream himself. "We'll cannibalize that Klingon vessel. Pirate the parts if necessary." He grinned challengingly. "Do you doubt that I could do it?"

Scott shook his head in reluctant admiration. "Maybe you could, Admiral, maybe you could."

Perhaps they had seen too many miracles. A world created and destroyed. A friend brought back from the dead. But for the moment, they knew that nothing was impossible.





Martha J. Bonds

Captain James T. Kirk walked down the corridor of the Starship Enterprise at a jaunty pace. He felt good, gratitude for being alive giving him a spring in his step. Not so many hours ago, he had thought he was finished, that death was going to catch up to him at last. He had been a doddering old man, aged beyond his years by the radiation from the comet that had passed by planet Gamma Hydra 4. 'I kept thinking it was Gamma Hydra 2,' he thought, shaking his head. Now that the life-and-death situation was past, he could afford to be bemused. He was no longer an old man. He was thirty four again, with a new lease on the years he had before him.

Kirk headed down the corridor toward his First Officer's quarters. He hadn't had time to talk to Spock since everything had been straightened out. The Vulcan had gone down to sickbay with McCoy so the doctor could administer a dose of the crude drug that had been developed to save the victims of the aging disease and Kirk hadn't seen him since. He had spoken to McCoy, though, and the doctor had said he thought something was troubling the Vulcan.

At the door to Spock's cabin, Kirk hesitated a moment. He felt a little uncomfortable, remembering the way he had spoken to his friend when he'd received the news that the competency hearing vote had gone against him. He needed to see Spock now, to make sure the Vulcan understood.

There was no verbal answer when he buzzed, but the door opened when Kirk raised a hand. He stepped inside, noting the high temperature. Like the planet Vulcan, the cabin radiated a dry heat, stifling but not so draining as humid temperatures would be.

"Spock?" Kirk turned toward the sleeping area and saw his First Officer lying across the bed. "Are you all right?"

At Kirk's approach, Spock rolled over and sat up. The Captain noted the slight wince that accompanied the movement. In the dim light of the firepot, the Vulcan's face looked pale and drawn. Kirk moved closer, laying a hand on a blue clad shoulder.

"Are you okay?" he repeated.

Spock's eyes flicked up for just a second, then the timid gaze darted away.

Kirk sat down, very close, his body angled toward his friend's. "What is it, Spock? How can I help?"

"It is...nothing. I merely pulled the muscles of my neck and shoulder during the reaction to the drug."

"Did you break anything in Sickbay?" Kirk let a teasing tone into his voice, but Spock didn't respond. "Everything else back to normal?" Kirk persisted. "Are you as sensitive to cold as you were?"

"That sense is slower in returning to normal," Spock admitted. "If you wish, I could lower the thermostat."

"No. It's not too bad." At the moment, Kirk decided, Spock's comfort was more important than his own. "Spock," he continued quietly, "I think we need to talk."

The Vulcan took a deep breath and shifted to look squarely at Kirk. "Captain. I wish to state that I regret the difficulty my actions during the recent incident may have caused you."

Kirk was certain he knew what Spock meant, and he realized the subject would have to be discussed openly, if it were to be placed in perspective. "You'd better translate that, Commander, if you really want me to know what it is you're talking about."

The expressive lips compressed into a thin line and the dark eyes looked deeply troubled. Spock tried again. "Jim...I'm sorry you thought I turned against you."

"Spock...you know you have nothing to apologize for! You were the one who was following regulations. It was me who was out of line, getting upset and saying I never wanted to look at you again." Kirk was as distressed as Spock.

His friend winced at the reference to the heated words that had been

directed toward him by his Captain. Kirk regretted what he had done as much as Spock, yet he did not know how to convince him that neither of them was at fault.

"Don't you know it was the disease making me talk that way to you?" he asked gently. "You know that under normal circumstances, I'd never feel that way...no matter what you did. Besides, you were following regulations."

"Regulations...." The Vulcan's voice was subdued. Then he appeared to adopt Kirk's philosophical outlook. "Perhaps it was the disease affecting me when I followed Commodore Stocker's suggestion of calling the competency hearing."

Kirk heard the sound of hope in the quiet words. "Of course. After all, it was an emergency situation. Stocker was responding to that. But he viewed me -all - of us - as if we were really old, not from the standpoint that we were suffering from a condition that merely resembled aging."

"I believe I see your point, Captain."

Kirk smiled. "Right. If I were really up in my sixties or seventies, don't you think I'd have even more knowledge from all that experience? People only became forgetful and incompetent in old age back in the twentieth century anyway, before the cure for Alzheimer's Disease was discovered."

"So it would seem," Spock answered. Kirk looked closely; there was the barest hint of a smile tugging at the corners of Spock's mouth. "And," the Vulcan went on, "I suppose that after twenty years or so, you would be firmly convinced of my loyalty."

Kirk responded to his friend's teasing. "You mean, you picture us still as Captain and First Officer of the Enterprise, twenty years from now?"

"'Picture' us?"

"You know what I mean - visualize us, imagine us." Kirk restrained a chuckle. "If you will permit yourself the frivolity."

"Vulcans are capable of imagining," Spock said with dry humor.

"Okay. Then how do you imagine we'll be in twenty years?"

"I suspect there would be a few changes." Spock was being careful. "Perhaps promotion, or two."

Kirk closed his eyes, feeling a mix of curiosity and eagerness. "How does 'Admiral Kirk' sound?"

"Quite good. Very suitable."

"And dignified. How do you like.. 'Captain Spock'?"

The Vulcan canted his head to one side, considering. "Perhaps."

Kirk laughed suddenly. "Picture McCoy in twenty years. Oh, Lord...."

"More crochety than ever," Spock agreed.

"He'll become just the model of his famous 'old country doctor'."

"But, of course, we assume that you and I will only become more learned and dignified through the years."

Spock's eyes were twinkling, Kirk could see. "Of course." Then he grew more pensive. "I think I'll still want to be in space. It will always be my favorite challenge."

"Indeed. Yet we may choose to spend less time in actual starship service."

"True. Let the youngsters take the big risks." They were quiet for a moment, each considering the possibilities. It was impossible to know what form their future would take, but Kirk really didn't want to know ahead of time. It would be worth it, to experience it all as it came, he and Spock together. He sighed. "I'd like to have a nice home somewhere...sometime."

"I, too."

"Yes..." Kirk could visualize it. "A beautiful place in...say, San Francisco, near the space port and Starfleet Academy. You can teach there."

"That would be a challenge." Spock looked as if he would enjoy the prospect. "And you can...direct Starfleet Operations from an imposing office, taking off on training missions every so often, just to show the cadets how things should be done correctly."

"I can see the apartment now. You and I, old star-farers with memories from a thousand worlds...."

"Antiques...."

"Sailing ships...."

"A fireplace, a view of the space harbor."

"Spock, sometimes you amaze me. It's that streak of poetry in your soul that's going to stand you in good stead as we age. Keep up with good ideas like that, and we'll make it out here for another twenty years."

"That would be fascinating, Captain. But I believe that your sense of adventure will prove the surest guarantee of our prosperity."

"I hope you're right, Spock. Maybe it won't be so bad, growing old as we travel on out here. I think it will certainly be worth living through, don't you?"

Spock nodded and the two sat together, each lost in his own thoughts of the future. Death and age and heartbreak seemed very far away, and they could not know if even one of their plans would ever come true, but each believed that the voyages they had yet to share would be worth all the dangers they might face.

TWO SHIPS

Snowy billowing sails,
Soft as clouds
Rounded as a woman's breasts,
Breathe in the salted wind...
And polished wood
Slices through white-capped waves
Of blackened sea
Moving silently, swiftly
Toward its mission of discovery.

Sleek silver nacelles
Straight as arrows
Firm as twin shafts of steel
Fired with dilithium energy...
And gleaming saucer
Propelled through crystal dotted void
Of midnight-space
Moving in a soundless vacuum
On its mission of exploration

Two ships
Navigated by the stars
Carry adventures
To worlds unknown
And lands of dreams...
One goes down to the sea
Its final resting place -
A briny grave
One burns down through space
The blazing trail of
A fiery star
And history writes the legends
Of men and Ships.

Beverly Volker



Even A Vulcan

Steve Wilson

Author's Note: This story is a sequel of sorts to "In the Name of Friendship", which appeared in Destiny's Children 1. In that story, set eighteen months after Star Trek - The Motion Picture, Spock was acting as co-captain of an exploratory mission to Hellguard, an abandoned Romulan colony world. There, he found a half-Vulcan, half-Romulan child among the ruins. He established telepathic contact with the girl, whom he christened Saavik. This story takes up after Spock and his crew have completed their studies and left Hellguard for Federation space.

Spock gazed in at the sleeping child, allowing himself the slightest smile. It was late - as ship's time dictated, anyway - and the other members of the expedition had gone to bed. Spock, however, had been keeping irregular hours throughout the course of this mission. The others were Vulcan civilians, thus requiring more normal schedules, but the Starfleet science officer was used to the dayless, nightless schedule of a starship.

Spock was grateful that he was able to spend these hours away from the others. Not that he disliked their company, of course; that would be illogical. He simply felt more comfortable, more at peace, when he was alone. Starfleet officers - even Vulcan ones - were often loners at heart. They were set apart in one way or another from those around them. His more than twenty years in the fleet had made him more set in his idiosyncratic ways than he had been on his home planet. After so many years away from the judgmental eyes of his fellow Vulcans, he found himself uncomfortable to be among them again. He had to admit that it was purely an emotional problem, but it was still satisfying to be alone and give oneself the luxury of a smile, for instance.

And, Spock thought, he had reason to smile at the child, Saavik. Her presence aboard the tiny scoutship as it made its way to a rendezvous with the Enterprise was quite a victory - for both of them. Spock had seen the child early on in the science team's two-week stay on the Romulan colony world Hellguard. She had been completely wild - naked, malnourished, illiterate with no idea of what spoken language even was, and terrified of people. No doubt she had been abused by the Romulan soldiers who had evacuated the colony and abandoned her and the other half-caste Vulcan-Romulan children there.

At first, she had not allowed him to come near her, although she had approached the party's campfire, hoping to find food. She had been skittish, bolting the moment he got close enough to touch, utterly refusing to allow his mind inside hers. Making contact had been slow, but he had finally calmed her fears and joined their minds. He had made her understand that he wanted only to help her.

Even after he had overcome Saavik's fear of him, even after he had convinced her to stay at the campsite with the expedition members, he still had to overcome his colleague's objections to her presence. T'Vel, his civilian co-captain, had been particularly adamant. She agreed, as any Vulcan would, that the half-castes deserved their aid; but like an old-Earth aristocrat donating aid to charity, she did not want to get personally involved. She didn't want any of the children returned to the Federation and integrated into Vulcan society, where their Romulan genes and wild lives might cause them to bring violence to a peaceful society.

Spock had won the child's right to accompany them back, however, by convincing his fellow team members that they would need an example of one of the refugees to bring before the Federation Council. Since he had already established contact and built up a relationship of trust with this child, it was only logical that she be that example. Even T'Vel had been forced to give consent. It wouldn't have done for her to be too stubborn with her co-captain. Although he was only a military officer, he was respected by the council. And, even among Vulcans, the fact that he was the son of the ambassador to the Babel conference held some sway.

Spock had spent the remaining days on the planet and this first day aboard ship educating Saavik. He had taught her spoken language first - Federation standard - and he had already begun to indoctrinate her in basic principles of science and mathematics. Normally, Vulcan children were not taught by using telepathy, since Vulcans did not use their telepathic abilities with great regularity. Spock felt it necessary, however, that Saavik be brought up to the level of other fourteen-year-old children; and this required a highly accelerated program of study.

Were the girl not a Vulcan, she would require even more extensive telepathic therapy. Children of other races who had not learned a spoken language by fourteen were practically incapable of being taught. Fortunately, Vulcans matured at a much slower rate and had the advantage of being genetically prepared for telepathic contact.

She spoke now on about the level of a six-year-old human child and had learned considerably more in the scientific areas. Mathematics was a universal language and was therefore not dependent on Saavik's progress with her linguistic ability.

As Spock turned now to leave the room - his quarters, he planned to sleep in the sickbay - the child stirred, rolling over and giving a small moan. Spock crept quietly to her side, watching her carefully. Her eyes showed the highly accelerated movement of dream sleep. In his mind, Spock could feel her waking presence. Something was disturbing her; he felt fear in her thoughts.

"Saavikam?" he whispered. "Are you awake?"

"Yes," said the child.

"Is something disturbing you?"

"I'm afraid. I was...back there." The child shivered and hugged herself, looking frightened.

Unlike a human child, she had not cried out. Had Spock not shared her thoughts, he would have had no indication that she had been awakened by a nightmare. Like a true Vulcan, she had controlled her fear. Inwardly, Spock was proud. Then he stopped, and asked himself, 'who is she to you that you feel pride?'

Spock had never felt pride in another's accomplishments.

"You were back on Hellguard?"

"Hell..guard. Yes. I'm afraid, Spock." Her voice was suddenly urgent, less of her restraint was evident.

He felt an impulse to touch the child, to stroke her hair, but it would not have been in keeping. He was, after all, trying to teach her the Vulcan way. Instead, he merely stepped closer and said quietly, "It was only a dream. Dreams are not reality."

"But they seem so real. They are...they frighten me."

Spock again fought down an urge to make physical contact. "Nothing can harm you here. Only the rest of the crew are aboard."

"They look like the others," the child said quietly.

"Others?" Spock asked, his eyebrow raised. "You are referring to the Romulans?"

"The others who look like us," said the child emphatically. She didn't know what 'Romulans' were. "The others were ...they hurt me. They hurt people. They killed."

Spock's eyes involuntarily went to the floor. This child had lived through atrocities he could not dream of, and she was so young. "I know," he said quietly. "But they are not here. No one will hurt you now. The dreams can only frighten you, and fear can be dealt with."

"I will try not to be afraid," the child promised.

Spock smiled. "And I will try to see to it that you have nothing to fear."

Saavik looked calmer now. "Thank you, Spock."

"Are you well enough to go back to sleep?" he asked her.

"Maybe...." the child began, then hung her head.

"Yes?" Spock prompted.

"Could you...could you sleep here? With me? I would not be afraid."

Spock hesitated. So simple a request, yet so hard for him to fulfill. Vulcan children were taught in self-reliance. She had been through a terrifying ordeal, but still...T'Pol and the others would not approve.

But then, they had never approved of him before...throughout this entire mission. Did he wish to teach the child the Vulcan way, or was he merely afraid of his human half? Was he merely trying to make a demonstration of his Vulcan discipline to the others?

No. Logic dictated that the child should learn that there was nothing to fear. Her development had been hindered enough already: there was no need to upset it any further.

"Fears must be confronted by the individual, Saavik. I cannot dispel your nightmare for you. You must face it yourself and conquer it. Do you understand?"

The child considered this. "I think. I will try to...face my own fear, Spock. I think I can do it. They're only dreams, as you said. And at least the dreams are never as bad as what really happened."

Again Spock averted his eyes, ashamed as a civilized being that a child could have been made to suffer so. He turned and went back out the door. He could have at least pulled the covers tighter around the girl's small form, but he said only, "Sleep well, Saavikam," and left.

As he walked to sickbay he was surprised by a voice coming through the door of the rear bulkhead. "Good evening."

He turned to face the elegant, silver-and-gold haired woman who stepped through the doorway which led to the other crew quarters. "And to you, T'Vel," he said formally. "Isn't it late for you to be awake?"

"I do not require great amounts of sleep," the older woman replied. "And I was curious."

"Curious?" asked Spock. "May I inquire as to the object of your curiosity?"

"Indeed you may. You, Spock, are the object of my curiosity."

"I?"

"Yes. You are a mystery. I find mysteries fascinating. That is, I suppose, why I am a scientist." T'Vel crossed slowly toward the main viewscreen as she spoke, rubbing her chin with steepled fingers. "Tell me, Commander, what is it that you do during these hours while the rest of us sleep?"

Spock considered giving her a very human response of 'none of your damn business'. Jim Kirk would have, but T'Vel was a Vulcan; and such terminology would not be effective against her. As a logical being, she would probably conclude that he was paranoid or that he had something to hide. Never mind the fact that the question was rude and violated Spock's privacy, an irrational response to rudeness was still an irrational response.

Instead, Spock said simply, "I make use of it to review our data and consider my recommendations to the council regarding the inhabitants of Hellguard."

"And you can only carry out such work while the rest of us sleep?" T'Vel asked pointedly.

"I find it more efficient to work without interruption. That is all."

T'Vel raised her eyebrow. Were she a human, her next question would have sounded like an accusation; but she was not human. Vulcans did not accuse, they only sought the truth. "Do you also take this time to talk to the child?"

"Occasionally," Spock replied honestly. There was no point in hiding the truth. T'Vel already objected to Saavik's presence here. Her opinion of the child could not be lowered. "She has much to learn before she can adjust to our way of life."

"I take it then, that you intend for her to be a part of our way of life?"

"That would seem a logical conclusion," admitted Spock.

T'Vel shook her head slowly. "She cannot become a part of that way of life, Spock. That should be evident to you."

"She is intelligent and an adept student," said Spock in Saavik's defense. "She would be an asset to our people in whatever field she chose to follow."

"She is a savage, Spock," said T'Pel dispassionately. "Savages cannot be tamed, and they can corrupt a civilized society." The older woman studied him for a moment, as if searching for a flaw in the heart of a gem. "The child is directly related to the mystery I find in you, in fact. Why do you defend her so? Your arguments when any of us speak of her is beyond logical debate. You seem almost... emotionally attached to her." T'Vel spoke the word as if it were profane.

"I will not debate the question of emotional attachment, T'Vel," Spock said evenly, plainly letting the woman know that this subject was none of her business. Even she would not be so rude as to pry further. "And I have told you my reason for bringing the child here: I intend to take her before the council, to show them living proof of the unacceptable situation which exists with the refugees."

"Unacceptable? You are being unrealistic, Spock. The situation cannot be changed. That, by definition, makes it acceptable. You have a very human tendency to fight the inevitable."

Spock nodded. "Perhaps. I find it prevents me from giving up too soon, or from making excuses in order to avoid facing a difficult situation."

"I do not make excuses," said T'Vel, drawing herself up and raising her head high. "I state fact. Romulans are an uncivilized species - by our standards. They are violent, with little or no regard for life. To bring such elements into Vulcan society - even in the form of one young girl - could cause irreparable damage."

"What do you suggest we do with them?" asked Spock, trying to avoid sounding disgusted with her racial prejudices. "Institutionalize them? Send them off to an undeveloped colony planet?"

"Those are possibilities," T'Vel said, unflinching.

"And what of our responsibility to them?"

"We have none, Spock. The children are of an unidentified line. Because of their Romulan heritage, we could not accept them as Vulcans - even if we did know who their Vulcan parents were."

Spock almost sighed, annoyed by her callousness. Even a Vulcan should not have been so cold. "Then what of compassion, T'Vel? What of our belief that life - in all its diversity - is sacred? These children are living beings. For us to refuse to help them would be to accept responsibility for their deaths."

T'Vel looked almost sad for a moment. "Perhaps to bring about their deaths would be most compassionate. They should never have come into existence at all. They are a pathetic offspring of Romulan cruelty."

Spock felt a surge of anger run through him. Slowly, methodically, he channeled it and calmed it. No trace of it came to his voice as he said, "You speak often of Romulan cruelty, T'Vel. I might remind you that I am the only member of this expedition who has ever actually met a Romulan. In fact, they consider themselves honorable, civilized beings. They are quite capable of logic - when its use serves their purpose. Very probably, the officers who abandoned the refugees on the planet made the same logical argument you are making now. I think the distance you place between the Romulans and yourself needs to be recalculated."

Spock wished T'Vel a good night and walked calmly back through the bulkhead toward the sickbay.

The child Spock awakened suddenly, looking frantically about the room. He had only been dreaming, he realized. Only a dream could have related such an illogical chain of events. His mind had shown him a scene from school. The other boys - the ones who always told him he wasn't really Vulcan - had turned on him violently. They had attacked him, trying to rid themselves of the emotional creature whose presence on their planet offended them so.

With their bare hands, the boys had pulled him to the ground and begun to tear the flesh from his body. In a grotesque imitation of the way of their barbaric ancestors, they had kept him conscious while they tore the very life from his body.

But it was only a dream. The boys did not care for him, but they would never harm him.

At least, during daylight, they had never harmed him. But it wasn't daylight now; it was dark. How was he to know....?

Something moved in the corner.

Was he, Spock wondered, to die now? As young as he was, was his life to be over. He was afraid. It was not right for a Vulcan child to be afraid, but he was nevertheless.

His mother appeared. Where had she come from? He wasn't sure. He didn't think he had called her. To call her would have been to display fear, and he did not wish to display fear. Regardless of the reason, she was here now.

"Spock?" she asked, stroking his forehead gently, brushing away beads of sweat that had formed there. Even the cooling systems did not keep the house completely comfortable during the hot summers of Shikahr. Spock's doctor had told him he was less equipped to stand the heat because he was half human.

Half human. Not acceptable.

"Spock?" his mother said again. "Were you having a nightmare? It's over now, darling. It was only a dream. Your father and I are here, and you're safe. Don't be afraid now."

"I...I wasn't afraid, mother," Spock managed.

Amanda smiled. "No, of course you weren't. Dreams don't frighten you, do they?"

"No," Spock heard himself say. Why did he say that? He was afraid! But fear was illogical. Still...if he weren't alone, it would be easier. "I'm not afraid," he said again, "but could you stay with me?"

His mother looked hesitant. "I really don't know, Spock. Your father might not...."

Sarek was suddenly there. A patch of darkness had transformed itself into his features. "Might not approve, my wife?"

Amanda turned. "It is not the Vulcan way, my husband. Self-reliance...."

"Has its place," Sarek said evenly. "As does providing a properly secure atmosphere for a child - one free of anxiety."

Amanda smiled. "Like a human father - spoiling his son."

Sarek looked offended. "Like a Vulcan one, my wife, making allowances for the fact that his son is a five-year old child. Even a Vulcan child is entitled

to the knowledge that his parents are present to protect him from fear. Even our code knows flexibility. To subscribe to dogma would be...."

"Illogical?" Amanda laughed. "Whatever you say, my husband. May I stay with Spock?"

"Of course, Amanda. Even Vulcans cannot always confront his fears alone. It is in combining our abilities that we find strength."

Sarek dematerialized, leaving mother and son in the dark. No more nightmares came that night.

An adult Spock now roused himself from sleep. Odd that he would dream of his childhood now. That he would find himself reliving an incident stored so far in the back of his mind that he had all but forgotten it - an incident which paralleled his own situation earlier tonight.

Paralleled, that was, in every way but one; Spock had not been so flexible, so...human...as his father. Perhaps....

A sound caught his attention from a shadowed corner of the compartment. Someone was in here with him. That must have been what had brought him out of his sleep - the sensation of another presence, watching him. He knew who it might be.

"Saavik?" he said gently. The small figure stepped forward, hanging its head. "What are you doing out of bed?" he asked.

"I..." the child began shakily. "I was...back there again."

"You are frightened?"

"No."

Spock smiled in the darkness. "it is more honorable to admit an unpleasant truth to lie to preserve one's image," he said gently.

Saavik nodded. "I am frightened."

"It is nothing to be ashamed of. We all have emotions. It is in how we deal with them that we find honor or shame."



The child was badly shaken. He heard very faint sobs in her voice. "I tried to face the fear. I tried to be strong - I'm sorry."

"It is I who am sorry."

"You?" the small voice asked incredulously.

"Yes. It was wrong of me to refuse your request. Allowances must be made. Inflexibility is a sign of intellectual weakness."

"What do you mean?"

Spock reached out and hesitantly brushed her cheek. "I mean that you may stay - if you wish."

The child touched her hand tentatively to his. "I would like that."

"Then come." He gathered the child's skinny body in one arm and drew her against him on the bed. She nestled comfortably against his shoulder and soon began breathing evenly in sleep. There was a tiny smile on her face.

In the morning, Spock knew, someone would find them here, and express disapproval. He did not find himself concerned by it. The disapproval of the others did not worry him. He knew his motives. And, if they weren't entirely logical, what of it? Only rigid caricatures like T'Pol applied strict rules of conduct to every situation. There were times when compassion had its place. Sometimes, even a Vulcan did not wish to be alone.



A STROKE OF LUCK

by: Sandy Zier

Art: Mary Mills

Spock was still protesting as he, McCoy and Kirk materialized on the surface of the shore leave planet. "Captain, Vulcans do not perceive 'play' to equal R&R, as do humans."

"Come on Spock, be a sport." McCoy chided. "Jim's idea of going aboard one of those old battleships can't be all bad. Where's your sense of adventure?" McCoy himself was not too enthused with Kirk's idea, nevertheless, if he had to go along, he didn't want to be the only one.

McCoy's comment provoked a raised eyebrow on the Vulcan's features. "I assure you, Doctor, I do maintain a sense of adventure. The mere fact it does not include experiencing something from earth's violent history does not..."

Kirk interrupted. "Hold it, both of you. I didn't twist either of your arms to get you to come, so I'd suggest you stop bickering. Let's get this show on the road!" *No not twist, he thought. More like tricked them into coming.* He chuckled to himself as he recalled their reactions when he first told them of the idea.



The Enterprise's crew had just completed a tedious stint of star charting. They were becoming restless and irritable. Kirk had authorized R&R for everyone since there were no immediate assignments. *Maybe, he had thought, Bones, Spock and I could get some time together. It has been a long time since the three of us have been able to get away from it all.*

With that thought in mind, Kirk approached Dr. McCoy in sickbay. The doctor was about to call it a day...

"You want to what!" McCoy sputtered. "Go off on some battleship where? That's not my idea of fun, Jim. We've had enough battles right here on the Enterprise."

Kirk had expected Spock to protest, but he had hoped he would have McCoy to back him up. Apparently this was not to be. "Bones, I've always wanted to know what it would be like aboard a 20th century sea-going vessel. You know that. This is my chance. On the shore leave planet you don't have to worry about anything going wrong. It will be interesting to see what fighting a battle in those times would be like." Kirk could see McCoy was not convinced. "Besides, we may learn something... and it could be a real adventure."

"For you, maybe." McCoy retorted. "I get all the adventure I need right here. And as for things going wrong, I remember the last time we visited this place." The doctor cringed at the memory of his own "fatal blow."

"All the more reason you should go along, Bones." Kirk knew he had the doctor on that one.

"Now that's hitting below the belt. Well, I don't know. If I go it will be under protest. But how do you propose to convince our Vulcan to accompany us?"

"Accompany you where, Doctor?" Spock entered without being heard.

"Oh, hello, Spock," Kirk turned to face the Vulcan. "We were discussing an idea I have for an experience we could all share on the shore leave planet... a fabulous idea. Bones is joining me and I'd really like you to come along."

"Before I answer, Captain, please explain this 'experience'." Spock stated skeptically.

"Well, with as many battles as we've fought on the Enterprise, I thought it might be interesting to experience a battle on the 'high seas'." Spock was not looking too keen on the idea. "Just the kind of thing that should appeal to adventurers like us," the human coaxed.

Spock did not appear convinced. "If I fully understand the mechanics of the planet, Captain, there is an element of danger and whatever happens would seem real at the time."

"I agree with Spock," McCoy said reluctantly. "We really don't know everything there is to know... we should be certain there's no risk."

"Look, you two are being too cautious. If you don't want to come along, that's fine. I just thought it'd be nice for the three of us to do something together." Kirk turned to leave. "But I'm still going whether you come with me or not."

"Jim, wait." McCoy demanded. "If you're going to be stubborn about this, I'll go along... if nothing else but to make sure you stay out of trouble." He turned to Spock. "What about you?"

"Perhaps I will, Doctor. When would we depart on this adventure, Captain?"

"Immediately, assuming you are going. No need to take any supplies -- that's one nice thing about the shore leave planet."

Spock still looked reluctant. "Captain, I do not see the logic in taking part in a battle, in a make-believe situation. The purpose of R&R is for rest... "

"Yes, Spock, I know... I know." Kirk interrupted before his first officer could continue his literal interpretation of R&R. "But, as I explained before, even an exhausting physical experience can be enjoyable." He hesitated and added, "I really would like you to come, Mr. Spock."

"Very well, Captain. Shall I meet you at the transporter?"

"No, we are leaving now... before either of you has a chance to change your mind." Kirk led the two officers out of sickbay to the transporter room.



No, *it hadn't been too difficult*, Kirk thought. *Well, on with it.* The human moved towards the shore of a wide river. "Since I want a battleship, I guess we'd better be near the water."

"That would be a logical assumption, Captain," Spock commented.

"Yes," Kirk was pensive as he looked across the water. "You know, there used to be monuments to the battleships. People could tour the actual ship to see part of their nation's history. I wonder if they still exist. One of these days, maybe I'll look into it..." The Captain's ramblings were interrupted with a large, gray World War II battleship appearing around the bend. The river, simultaneously, became a vast body of water, seemingly knowing no boundaries.

"Well, I would say we've found what you were looking for," McCoy stated, staring at the vastness of the ship. He had expected big... but this was beyond his imagination.

Even Spock seemed impressed at the size of the vessel. "Jim, I had no idea your Earth's battleships were so large. I was aware that they served many functions, however..."

Kirk was also taken in by the sight. He was almost as anxious as when he first boarded the Enterprise. "Let's go," he yelled as he started to run towards the ship, "They're pulling up anchor. We've got to get going."

The three made their way up the gangplank of the ship, seeming to fit into the surroundings despite their Starfleet attire. They were approached by one of the crew. "Hi, you three must be the last-minute crewmembers. We're about ready to ship out, so let me give you a quick tour. Later, when things are quiet, your superior will give you a run down of your duties and responsibilities. By the way, my name is Andrew Parks; everyone just called me Andy."

They exchanged greetings and the quick tour turned out to take almost an hour. Finally, they were shown to their bunks.

"We must have climbed a million steps in the past hour," McCoy complained as he sat down. "And these bunks leave a lot to be desired."

"Doctor, complaining about our predicament will not make things easier. I believe we should, as you humans say, humor the Captain. Perhaps when he experiences the hardships of life aboard this vessel, he will choose to end his illusion early," Spock added, with a glint of hope in his voice. His intrigue with this adventure was waning quickly.

"I wouldn't count on it," McCoy mumbled.

Kirk, who had stayed behind to check out the duty assignments, came to them wearing a grin like the cat who had swallowed the proverbial canary. "Looks like we're assigned together." We'll be working the guns below deck -- close quarters, but exciting."

"In your opinion," McCoy grumbled. "I don't know anything about guns."

"Captain, are you certain you wish to continue with this?"

"A battle is precisely what I *want*." Kirk looked at his friends' silent, doubtful faces. "What's the sense of adventure if you can't take a few risks anyway? We take them all the time on the Enterprise. Besides, I didn't ask you two along to play mother hen. The idea was for us to do something together -- the three of us. And, speaking of which, we'd better get ourselves together and meet Lieutenant Phillips -- our superior -- and remember just that: he is our superior, the one we take orders from."



The following days were hectic for the three Enterprise men. Between orienting themselves to the ship and learning as much as they could about the guns to which they were assigned, sleep was something to which they all looked forward each night. They tried to avoid pointed questions from the rest of the crew as to their origins and background. Kirk reflected that it was odd that no one seemed to question Spock's pointed ears; just as no one had questioned their Starfleet uniforms either. Apparently they seemed usual to the participants of the illusion just as they had the time the men had been on the Melkotian planet.

Spock gradually was caught up in the adventure, wanting to learn everything he could about how the ship worked. He often commented that they it was not as efficient as it could be if computers were put to work, but Kirk reminded him that computers were a thing of the *future* -- and for its time, he was sure the equipment on board this ship was state-of-the-art.

McCoy did nothing but grumble; at least until he managed to become friendly with the ship's doctor and therefore, without giving away his true occupation, was able to learn a lot about the medicine practiced on board such a ship as this one. Especially, despite the vastness of the ship, within the close confines of the sickbay. Although primitive, by 23rd century standards, the quality of care and the actual set up of the sickbay were impressive.

"Jim," McCoy reported one day after one of his explorations. "they even have a dental office -- with an old-time dentist chair and gas mask, and an operating room with a separate scrub room where the surgeon can prepare for surgery. And the doctor told me there's a post office where handwritten letters can be mailed, as well as a ship's store. That seems to be a lot like our own supply center on the Enterprise."

"Yeah, I know Bones. It's like a city on the water -- with everything, well almost everything, you could ask for." The Captain was pleased with the enthusiasm his two friends were showing, despite their initial reluctance to join him..

Spock, who had been silent up until now, commented. "I agree Captain. I do not see anything that the crew aboard this vessel could possibly lack."

The Captain grinned, "Outside of a few good-looking females, you mean, Mr. Spock."

"Captain, I do not believe these ships were made for the coexistence of the male and female... "

"Yeah, I know Spock. I was just making an observation. You *had* said you did not see *anything* anyone would want. I was just pointing out that it doesn't have *everything*." Before Spock could response, he added, "I'm going to do a little more exploring, if either of you care to join me. Then, we'd better sleep. Tomorrow, we're supposed to see battle."

"I'll pass. I'm already having trouble keeping my eyes open." McCoy commented.

"I will remain with Dr. McCoy, Jim. Please be careful." Spock added.



James Kirk happened upon a friendly card game in which one of the players was Andy Parks.

"Come on and join us, Jim" the guide said as he noticed Kirk standing nearby. "It's just a friendly game of penny-ante."

"Okay, but you'll have to tell me the rules... I've never played this game before."

"Sure... you must not have spent much time at sea. There sure isn't much else to do."

"No I haven't. In fact, this is my first time on a battleship." Kirk commented. He wasn't lying, after all. He had never been on a *battleship*.

The game continued well into the night, with Kirk enjoying the drink and friendly comradery of his shipmates. After the game was over, Andy brought out a guitar and played some old seafaring songs, some of which Kirk vaguely recognized -- all of which he enjoyed tremendously.

Eventually, Kirk realized how long he had left his two friends, who were now either asleep and didn't realize he was still gone, or more likely, awake and wondering where he was. *It would be just like Spock to stay awake until I returned*, he reflected.



Kirk returned surprised and relieved to find his two friends sound asleep. *Lucky for me -- I'd hate to explain to Spock what "penny-ante" is.* As he readied himself for bed, he realized just how tired he was. Once he lay down he did not remember anything until whistles and horns announced that morning had come.



The ship's guns had not been terribly difficult for the three men to master -- they mainly had to get used to the backlash from the firing. Spock was first to adapt but soon all three were nearly as proficient as though it had been their life's work.

Kirk and Spock were stationed on the port side of the ship and McCoy was stationed on the starboard side. Though Kirk didn't like the idea of the three of them being separated, there was nothing he could do about it. They were, at least, in the same vicinity. Granted they would have their communicators, but with the noise of battle, he wasn't certain they would be much help. Suddenly, orders rang out from the speakers and horns began sounding. The fight had started.

McCoy could not help wishing Kirk would get them out of this. He did not like the idea of being apart from Spock and the Captain. He was downright scared. Reluctantly, he realized he shouldn't worry, especially since there was nothing he could do about it.

Kirk and Spock saw most of the action. Minutes seemed like hours while they fired until they felt there could be nothing else at which to fire. There was a pause. The topside cannons had joined the battle, along with the guns. Apparently, the enemy had shot some torpedos toward the ship, which had missed their mark. The Commander of their ship gave orders to fire all artillery at the attacker.

Kirk was caught up in the activities. The sounds of guns going off, people yelling and screaming out orders and the smell of gunpowder had started his adrenalin flowing. The water whipping around served only to add to the fire in his blood.

Suddenly, there was a loud explosion, followed by shouting. The ship had been hit on the starboard side and was taking in water. Kirk and Spock simultaneously had one thought...

"Bones... Spock, we've got to get to Bones."

"Yes I know. We must proceed quickly." Both the Vulcan and the Human headed in the direction where McCoy was stationed. Their only concern now was for their friend.

Kirk shoved Spock ahead of him. "Okay, you lead the way, I'll be close behind... Hurry!"

The two men made their way up and around to the starboard side. While Spock moved ahead to seek out McCoy, Kirk paused to help a crewman who had been trapped in the harness of his gun. As Kirk attempted to release him, the support fell and pinned him against the wall of the ship. The force caused his left knee to hyperextend and left arm to bend at such an angle that could only mean a break. The round, solid support caught Kirk mid-chest and he realized, just as he lost consciousness, that he had broken some ribs. "Spock, help," he managed, before he passed out.

Spock, unaware of the injury to his Captain, proceeded to try to locate McCoy. He was directed towards the front of the starboard side of the ship. When he reached the place where the doctor should have been, he was told that the crewmember manning that particular weapon had been killed in the blast. Someone had already removed the body.

Spock felt an overwhelming grief. *McCoy is dead.* For a moment he was too stunned to think, then logic took over and he remembered that this was all an illusion. *He's not really dead.* Still, he knew they were in trouble. *We need him to get back to our own reality.* Yet there was nothing Spock could do immediately. He turned to find the Captain was not behind him.

Confused, his gaze quickly perused the area. Kirk had been following him. *What happened,* the Vulcan wondered. Barely willing to admit it even to himself, fear was inching its way into his soul. Realizing that they had not been returned to the shore leave planet's laboratories when McCoy was 'killed', as they should have been, Spock pushed that concern to the back of his mind for the moment and set upon finding the Captain.

The Vulcan's search for the Captain was a short one. When Spock found the human lying pinned against the wall, he rushed to help his friend. Kirk's breathing was very shallow, and beads of perspiration were evident on his forehead. The Human's arm seemed to dangle from his shoulder. Forgetting where he was, Spock began shouting orders as though he were still aboard the Enterprise. He picked up the Captain and carried him to the ship's sickbay.

Spock laid him on a bed -- aside from all the hanging cots for the injured -- not caring that this bed might be reserved for someone else. His only concern was his captain. Reality or no reality, Jim was suffering and that suffering must be stopped. His breathing was becoming more shallow. On closer inspection, Spock found that the left knee was badly swollen and discolored. There were bruises on his chest where the gun support had impacted and his right forearm was angled in an obvious break.

A medic came up to Spock. "That bed's usually for the Captain if he needs it, but your friend's badly hurt. Let him stay here for now. I'll get some bandages and clean him up as best I can. The doctor's in surgery. He'll tend to him as soon as he's done."



Spock merely nodded his agreement to the medic. "I'll stay here until he comes."

The medic gave him a long look, apparently deciding not to reckon with this man's decision. "Sure, I don't care." He shrugged. "It's not me you will have to answer to -- but your superior if he notices you're missing."

My superior is lying on the bed. Spock thought, sitting down next to Kirk. *And that is my only concern at the moment.*

The medic cleaned Kirk's abrasions and splinted his left leg, which had been badly strained. His right arm was broken, and would need casting by the ship's doctor.

As the medic tended Kirk's injuries, Spock began to wonder about McCoy's whereabouts -- and what the doctor would say if he was here now. *No doubt, he thought, he would comment on Jim's predilection for finding trouble on 'safe' planets. I only wish he were here to say it.* Spock's concern over the missing doctor grew. His thoughts were interrupted by the medic's voice.

"He's got a couple of broken ribs, so it would be best if he lay flat. If he wants to sit up a little, use this," the medic showed Spock a lever used to raise the head of the bed, "so that he won't have to put any stress on his chest muscles. Sorry I can't stay around and keep you company, but I've got other customers."

Spock nodded. "I understand. I shall call if I need any assistance."

As Spock watched his Captain sleep, he noticed Kirk was in little pain. *Remarkable, thought the Vulcan. Despite their primitive techniques, the bandaging and splinting are serving their purpose. Now, to ascertain why we haven't been returned to the planet's surface.*



James Kirk opened his eyes slowly, vaguely aware of voices. As his eyes adapted to the light, he became conscious of the injuries his body had suffered. He was unable to move his left leg or right arm. Breathing was also difficult. *Where am I, he thought. And what happened. I can't remember...* Kirk's thoughts were interrupted by a familiar voice.

"I'm glad to see you have awakened." Spock was sitting in a chair next to the bed. "How do you feel?"

Kirk attempted to sit up but thought better of it after noting a sharp, stabbing pain in his chest. "Spock, what the hell happened... where am I?" Kirk looked around as best he could. "This isn't sickbay. And where's Bones?"

"If you remember, Captain, we are on the shore leave planet. You wanted an experience aboard a seafaring vessel... and we ended up on a battleship, circa Earth's early 20th century..."

"I haven't lost my memory, Spock. I remember the ship being hit and the injury... by why aren't we back to *our* reality? -- *our* ship?"

"As you must know, Doctor McCoy and I are unable to undo your fantasy. The three of us must at least know the whereabouts of the others before our return can be successful." Spock hesitated.

"When the torpedo hit, it seems Dr. McCoy was killed." Kirk gasped.

Spock continued. "He will be alive in our reality. However, I have been unable to locate his body."

"Have you looked, Spock? If I know you, you've been right here the whole time. You should have been looking for Bones." Kirk understood the implications of what Spock had just told him. "Why weren't we all sent back if McCoy was killed? That's what's supposed to happen."

"Captain, I apologize. I don't know. It seems that since the time the bomb hit, nothing has gone the way it should. It is not logical, but nevertheless, true."

Kirk was puzzled. This was not the way things were supposed to happen on the shore leave planet. He took a moment to glance over his surroundings. The injured filled the bunks around him. His body was bandaged and his chest was strapped. "Who did this?" Kirk motioned with his eyes towards his bandages.

"One of the ship's medics." Spock bent down to use the manual control to raise Kirk's head slightly. "I'm told you are in stable condition?" Spock stated, with a hint of doubt in his voice.

"I feel all right, Spock." Kirk said, "It is painful when I move, but it is not too bad." Kirk knew he had to reassure the Vulcan. "I'll be as good as new when we return from this illusion." *I hope*, he added silently to himself. "How long have I been asleep?"

"You were unconscious at first, but the doctor gave you a sedative until proper care could be given. You have been asleep approximately 6.42 hours. And, if you are indeed feeling 'all right', I shall attempt to locate Dr. McCoy's body." Spock turned to leave, then hesitated. "Captain, I won't be gone long... please don't try to move."

Kirk grinned as he watched his friend leave. *Yes, Spock, he thought. What would ever make you think I would attempt to move... why, I'm a model patient.* Kirk chuckled to himself. Nevertheless, he knew he would stay put -- this time. No sense in letting Spock lose track of him as well.



McCoy entered the bridge. "Scotty, what the hell happened. Where's Jim and Spock. Why weren't we brought up together? I don't know why I am here and not there."

The Chief Engineer turned to face the angry doctor. "I dinna know, Doctor. On the planet's surface not far from where you beamed down, there was an electrical disturbance. It came on very quickly. I'm surprised to see even you."

"Well," the doctor replied, a bit more calmly. "I guess as soon as I was 'killed' in the fantasy, I was brought to the caretaker's underground labs. But the disturbance somehow must have interfered with the computer's ability to bring back the Captain and Mr. Spock." McCoy paused. "Scotty, I'll have to go down and talk to the caretaker. I don't know what else to do."

"Do you think you should, Doctor?" Scotty queried. "It might not be safe... we may lose you as well."

"Scotty," McCoy said. "I have to... someone has to. And I'm the only one who knows exactly -- or at least I think, exactly -- what's going on. Don't worry, I'll be careful."

"Okay," the Engineer reluctantly agreed. "but I still dinna like it."

"Believe me, I don't either. McCoy turned to leave the bridge and thought, *Jim and his adventures. So much for a safe planet.*



McCoy beamed back to the planet, and began his search for the caretaker. After what seemed like an eternity, he located him. "I apologize for the delay, Dr. McCoy." The man seemed a bit harried. "This has been an extremely busy time for me. There's been some difficulty... "

Leonard McCoy did not allow him to finish. "I know there have been difficulties, which is why I'm here. I need your help to find Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock. Apparently, they're still in the Captain's illusion, wondering where I am and unable to return without me."

"No doubt you are correct, Doctor," the caretaker agreed, "but I am sure there is a simple solution to the problem. All of the other difficulties caused by the electrical distortion have been sorted out." Sensing McCoy's next question, he added, "No, I don't know the cause of the distortion. I have not had time; my priority is the safety of my guests."

McCoy was growing impatient. "How do you propose to solve my problem? We were involved in a sea battle. They could be in danger."

"Not true," the caretaker disagreed. "Even though the danger seems real to those experiencing it, it is, indeed, an illusion and, therefore not permanent. However, what happened must be remedied. You must return to the illusion -- create it in your mind -- but you must be sure to return at the point before you were killed." he explained. "Then, assuming you do get back into the correct illusion, and your timing is right, all of you can be returned, as is the normal procedure here on the planet."

McCoy wasn't convinced by the Caretaker's apparent lack of concern and all too pat an answer. "And what happens if I don't? What will happen to Captain Kirk and Spock if I can't go back to the right time and place? Your sensors use the person's mind to create the illusion. This illusion was created in Kirk's mind." He was sensing a serious danger now.

"You'll have to be accurate, Dr. McCoy. If nothing else, by trial and error." With some hesitation, the caretaker added, "I assure you things will work out." He was more concerned himself than he would admit. This was the first real mishap on the planet. The Starfleet officer was already frightened, he tried not to add to that fear. He took a breath, and continued, "Come with me. You must be out of the range of the planet's sensors until you remember the point at which you must reenter the illusion."

The caretaker escorted McCoy underground to his labs, a place familiar to the doctor. He set himself to recalling the circumstances of his 'death.' *This is almost like having to use the Guardian, thought McCoy. He tried to remember what Jim had said... a battleship, like the Enterprise, but in the water, not in space. Back on earth, Jim had said -- before space became a place for confrontations.*

They had ended up on one of the U.S.'s largest battleships, preparing to go into battle. Eventually, they were attacked by fighter planes in the air, as well as opposing battleships in the sea. Before he died... *how strange, McCoy realized, trying to remember when I died...* McCoy tried to think of all the details he could. *The name of the ship, of course -- the U.S.S. North Carolina... he realized. I know the name of the ship... what could be more exact than that? In answer to his question -- time. He knew the time and battle from discussions he had had with the ship's doctor.*

When McCoy was ready, the Caretaker led him back to the surface. "Please be careful, and good luck, Doctor." The caretaker was gone before McCoy could thank him for his help.

McCoy began concentrating on what he could remember. Just as the illusion engulfed him, he heard a loud explosion and felt a searing pain go up his back... then blackness.



Spock had some difficulty finding his way through the maze of passageways and stairways. The battle had ceased, at least for the time being, and Spock could hear frantic attempts to make repairs and help the injured.

The Vulcan turned down one corridor and, suddenly, he heard the sounds of battle again. He thought he heard his Captain call his name. "Jim," Spock shouted, increasing his pace.

Passing through a doorway, Spock saw a replay of the bombing which had injured his Captain and 'killed' Doctor McCoy. Then, the entire scene seemed to fade around him.



While Spock was searching for McCoy, Kirk began to have doubts about the true safety of this planet. Even if this problem is resolved, it could happen again. *What happened, anyway?* he wondered. It would be terrible if the shore leave planet had to be kept off limits.

Kirk contemplated the problems this incident had caused and possible solutions. However, the sedatives the ship's doctor had administered were taking over. He lay his head back on the pillow, and succumbing to the effects of the medication, seemed to relive the events leading to his predicament.

Kirk found himself back at the gun when the torpedo hit the starboard side. Rushing to find Bones, his surroundings became a dense fog.



As the reality of the amusement planet appeared around them, Kirk, Spock and McCoy found themselves in their own reality, with no evidence of their adventure present.

All of them began to speak at once. "Bones!" "Spock!" "Jim!"

"I thought I was never going to see you two again." McCoy stammered, looking around to be sure of their whereabouts.

"Bones, Spock told me you had been killed, but we couldn't find you and we couldn't get back..."

Dr. McCoy interrupted. "There was an electrical distortion on the planet just as the torpedo hit the boat. Somehow, I was brought back to the planet without you two. But that stranded you in your illusion. Apparently things were going wrong all over because of the storm -- or whatever it was. I had to create an illusion of my own to coincide with the time and place just before I died." McCoy paused, for emphasis, "I must say, my calculations were, 'right on the mark', wouldn't you say, Spock?"

"Doctor McCoy, I am sure the proximity in time at which you reentered the illusion had nothing to do with your calculating ability. It was probably luck -- something you seem to have an amazing amount of." Spock commented dryly.

Before McCoy could offer a retort, Kirk interrupted. "I want to know if it offers a danger for those following us. After all... we could have..."

"No, Captain." The caretaker had appeared from nowhere, as always. "For the kind of distortion which occurred in that fraction of a second as Doctor McCoy was killed, yet before all three of you could be removed from the illusion to happen again would take odds of astronomical proportions." he explained.

"Still, the possibility exists, sir." Kirk was not totally convinced.

"Captain, I would say the risk is within the acceptable level... such as the chance of being injured in an athletic event or on leave. One can break a leg skiing, or drown while swimming." Spock interjected. "The odds would be... "

Kirk interrupted. "I get the general idea. In other words, it was a stroke of luck -- in our case -- bad."

"You could say that, Captain." The caretaker commented. "Of the thousands of people on the planet at the time of the distortion, your illusion was the only one affected... aside from minor delays in returning or arriving."

"Just our luck," mumbled McCoy.

"Precisely, doctor." Spock couldn't resist a jab at McCoy's 'luck.'

"Anyway," the caretaker continued. "Though we have yet to figure out exactly what occurred, my staff is studying it and I am confident we'll have the problem solved in no time. I assure you Captain, the amusement planet is safe for future visitors."

"Very well," Kirk replied. As he brought out his communicator to signal the Enterprise, he added, "Please let us know if we can help." Turning to his two friends, "I assume you two are ready to go back to the ship?"

"Assuming you mean the Enterprise, Captain, I am quite ready." Spock replied.

McCoy added, "For once, Mr. Spock, I agree with you. Let's go home, Jim."

"Fine, Scotty, three to beam up."



(Author's note: This story was inspired by a trip taken by the author and artist. Seeing sickbay on the ship, it was very easy to imagine our Captain lying in the bed, separate from all the other bunks and obviously set aside for someone of importance.)



The Search For

Words



A B O R I O N N E B U L A O N R E N N
 R I O O N E P I I K B I L B O R B O O O
 C L E O O H R K L R O C H A R L E Y Y U
 O K S L I M E D E V I L S R O N R H E R
 L O I L K L I N G O N S R E I S E E O A
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 N P O O K L T O S O K N P T I I I I H O

Answer found on page 179

SPOCK
 KIRK
 CHARLEY
 KLINGONS
 YEOMAN
 BONES

RAND
 KOBAYASHIMARU
 ORION NEBULA
 ENTERPRISE
 SLIMEDEVILS



Jan Davies

"Captain's Log, Stardate 5841.7. The Enterprise is approaching the fourth planet of the Saiph star system, where eleven months ago, the U.S.S. Constellation completed a preliminary survey. Captain Marque reported vague feelings of uneasiness about this particular planet. An interesting aside of possible significance, was that two of the three women in the landing party became pregnant, despite the intensive training in bioreproductive control that all Star Fleet personnel receive before they graduate from Star Fleet Academy."

Captain Kirk ended his log entry. He did not voice any criticism of the Constellation's Captain for leaving the planet survey incomplete, though he personally did not believe in unresolved mysteries. Privately he considered 'vague uneasiness' an unprofessional conclusion, but that was between Captain Marque and Admiral Komack. James Kirk had no intention of abandoning the planet until he could give a definite recommendation of its status.

"Status, Mr. Sulu?"

"We should reach Saiph in 3.7 hours."

Kirk turned to the Chief Medical Officer, conveniently standing beside him on the bridge. "Bones, I want every woman on board put on chemical contraceptives as long as we orbit this planet. I don't know why two of Marque's staff allowed themselves to conceive, but I can't afford to lose any of my crew to motherhood."

"I'll prepare a slow release implant. More convenient than a daily dose."

The doctor made no attempt to hide his amusement at the circumstances, and couldn't resist the temptation, "But isn't that a pretty chauvinistic attitude for the 23rd century?"

The rest of the bridge crew had been following the conversation with interest. Uhura swiveled on her chair to see the Captain's reaction to the doctor's barb.

Kirk considered it thoughtfully, aware of the eyes observing him. "All right." He changed his tone to one that brooked no nonsense. "Doctor McCoy, I want you to prepare and administer a chemical contraceptive implant for every member of the crew."

McCoy gulped, "Aye, aye, Captain." As he left the bridge, he was heard to mutter, "Should have kept my mouth shut."

To demonstrate competence, Starfleet required that those ranked third in command log a minimum amount of time as ranking officer on the ship.

Due to prolonged Romulan encounters, combined with Spock's aversion to shore leave, Chief Engineer Scott had fallen short on hours. To insure that Scotty kept his standing up to date, Kirk had arranged for Spock and himself to spend at least twenty-four hours off of the ship. Spock had agreed that this peaceful sector of the galaxy was a logical place to allow Scott to log his hours. ("It's either that, Spock, or I can arrange a two day stopover on Wrigley's Pleasure Planet for us.")

Determined to make the most of the situation, the Captain had ordered a reluctant Doctor McCoy to accompany them. ("Look at it this way, Bones. One less chance to get your molecules scrambled if you don't beam up overnight.")

The planet was beautiful, almost idyllic in its perfection. Vegetation ranged the spectrum of greens, encompassing bright shades of emerald, deep aquamarines along with the more subtle shades of olive. The sky was a rich azure, slightly deeper than the bluest Earth sky, trailing wisps of feather white clouds.

"Almost like home, eh, Jim?" McCoy asked happily, relishing the balmy climate.

"Hardly like your home planet, Doctor McCoy, though the chromaticity is similar," Spock said, not looking up from his tricorder. "There appears to be virtually no animal life."

"A vegetation ecology?" Kirk asked curiously. "Is that even possible?"

"It is possible for pollination to take place by entirely airborne means. My instruments register no zoic carbon life forms, therefore it would appear to be so." Spock made an adjustment to his tricorder and took another reading.

"What about silicon? We've missed that before."

"Doctor, it is a virtual impossibility that complex life forms, such as this vegetation would have evolved alongside silicon animal life," he continued as McCoy started to open his mouth. "However, anticipating your query, I have tested that hypothesis with my tricorder and the results are negative."

"Well, being without any animal predators, this place is a virtual paradise. It should be ideal for colonization," McCoy said enthusiastically.

"If you don't mind, Doctor, I would prefer a more thorough investigation before I second your recommendation. Edens are not always what they seem."

That squelched McCoy for a few moments. It had been only a few weeks earlier that the Enterprise had been hijacked by a group of free spirits, to a planet that could have been an Eden. Could have been, except for a deadly concentration of acid in all of the plant life. Silenced, the doctor took out his tricorder and began to take readings on a small bush with delicate fronds.

Kirk set down his bundle and began to dismantle it. "If there are no objections, I think this is as good a place as any to set up camp." He started to unfold the silvery fabric of the tent. "Looking forward to roughing it, Bones?"

"Not really," the doctor answered wryly. "I'd like to leave communing with nature and the great outdoors to the two of you. I tend to sleep better amid more civilized surroundings."

"Doctor, I have never been able to fathom why a man so resistant to new experiences would choose a career exploring the galaxy."

"You see, Mr. Spock, I figured somebody had to come along to patch the rest of you when you get yourselves banged up. Anyway, I'm a doctor, not a boy scout."

Kirk listened, amused by their pointless banter as he disassembled the camping equipment. Sometimes he suspected they engaged in it solely for his entertainment. "Well, Mr. Spock, is this Eden also booby trapped?"

"Acidity appears to be compatible with humanoid life. I have not detected any trace poisons, though that varies with each species. Even on our native

planets, some of the flora are toxic."

"I didn't actually expect to find Never-Never Land, Mr. Spock. Just a reasonably healthy environment for Federation colonists."

The science officer set his tricorder on the ground and began to assist Kirk with the tent's assembly. Within minutes, the temporary structure was standing, a classic cabin style tent made of a light but sturdy synthetic.

Kirk surveyed their completed encampment and glanced at the white sun, low on the horizon. "We still have a few hours before dark to check out this place." He spoke half jokingly. "Think there are any man-eating plants around?"

Characteristically, Spock considered the question seriously. "It is unlikely that carnivorous vegetation would have evolved, there being nothing for it to eat," he explained patiently. "This may possibly be one of the most benign planets we have yet encountered."

"You won't take offense if I continue to carry my phaser, will you, Mr. Spock?" he said, instinctively touching his hand to it.

"Not at all, Captain, if it gives you emotional security." Spock met his eyes briefly with a flicker of humor.

"Well, as long as we have time, I might as well check for microscopic life." McCoy adjusted his tricorder. "I think there's a small body of water beyond those trees."

Spock agreed. "Possibly a pond or small lake."

McCoy slung the tricorder over his shoulder and picked up two large sample cases from one of the bundles they had left lying next to the tent. He handed one to Kirk. "Here, Jim, make yourself useful."

A cluster of blue sparkles observed the three bipedal figures as they left the glade. "Alpaque," it signalled, "we have visitors."

An almost identical cluster shimmered cerulescently. "I see them, Amienlar."

"They appear to be of the same species as those that visited us two revolutions ago."

Alpaque twinkled in happy remembrance. "They were delicious."

"Yes, they were." Amienlar extended its telesensors to examine the retreating creatures more closely. "Two are of the same species as our previous visitors. However, the other appears slightly different in physiology. That could mean a vast difference in sapidity."

"Why don't you try that one, Amienlar. You're the gourmet."

"I think I will," Amienlar sparkled agreeably. Amienlar was always agreeable. Come to think of it, so was Alpaque.

It was almost dusk when the three officers trudged back to the campsite. Kirk stifled a yawn and glanced at his chronometer. "It's not that late, but all of this hiking has tired me out. I think I'll turn in early tonight."

Spock completed labeling the last of his samples. "That seems judicious, Captain. I, too will retire once we complete our encampment in order to facilitate an early start tomorrow.

The communicator signal interrupted their preparations. "Kirk here."

"Captain," Scott's voice came over the communicator. "I have a message for Doctor McCoy from the Life Science lab. They say that sea mammal they picked up from Rigel 2 has gone into labor."

Kirk turned to McCoy questioningly. The Doctor broke into a huge grin. "Hmm - this is earlier than I expected. It could last several hours. Or all night."

"Why do you have to be there, Bones?"

"This is the first time we'd had the opportunity to observe a Rigillian otter give birth. And I have to be there if any complications develop, don't I?"

Kirk stared at him suspiciously. "If you arranged this to get yourself back on the ship...."

McCoy drawled innocently, "Now, Jim boy, we in the medical profession allow Mother Nature to make a few decisions for herself."

"I'm sure," he muttered.

Making no attempt to hide his pleasure at the turn of events, McCoy said, "Well, I guess I'd better beam up. Tomorrow, I think I'll send Lieutenant Saverese from botany in my place. Seems more appropriate to me.

"A logical decision, Doctor," Spock said. "Would you please see to it that Lieutenant Metzler gets these geological samples with instructions that they are to be analyzed?"

McCoy balanced the case on top of his own, wedging it under his chin. "Give your department something to do all night."

Kirk smiled as he opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here, sir."

"Scotty, fix a transporter beam on Doctor McCoy. He's five meters in front of me."

"Aye, Captain."

Kirk watched McCoy shimmer out in the fading dusk. He and Spock set up the cots and unpacked the rest of the gear. He unloaded a small microviewer and turned to Spock questioningly. "You planned to read tonight?"

A flicker of temptation passed the science officer's face, but he shook his head slightly. "No. As I told Doctor McCoy, it would not be sensible to be fatigued tomorrow. This is a unique and diverse ecology - we must utilize our allotted time on its examination."

Darkness rapidly descended on the small clearing as the two officers subsided into sleep.

Slimey creatures - on Spock's back - digging into him through the shirt.

I pull at it...can't get a grip. Slime against my hands - but strong, too strong.

Must pull it...it's hurting Spock. I have it. It's off.

Tendrils in a glass jar. See, McCoy shows me...clear filaments in the water. From Spock? Inside Spock?

Crawling inside, up and down his spine - twisting, strangling nerves, muscles. Eating him from inside.

Too many - take them out, Bones. Can't...too many. You must take them out!

He suffers. I can see the pain he tries to hide. He says it's gone, but I know it's not. Peter suffers so...even in his sleep. They killed Sam...Aurelan. Strangled from inside. They will kill Spock.

Filaments - weaving - inside of Spock. Inside of my brother. Tendrils cross the stars, weaving a tight net across the galaxy.

Voices beseiging. McCoy and Spock. Must stop them. "You, Jim Kirk. You are the only one who can. Must destroy Deneva. And Spock. And Peter. You have the power."

No. I can't. Not you, Spock.

You must. Even a Vulcan has limits. Even a Vulcan.

He was released from the nightmare, his face wet with tears. A limbo of dream and reality, he lay in darkness, but still felt the ache of pain. Spock must die. Spock would die, and by his own hand.

He scrubbed at his eyes, and blinked away the wetness. Slowly, reality began to sift in, and he remembered the rest of what had happened on Deneva - how they had found a way to kill the parasites with light, how their first experiment had blinded Spock, although thankfully only temporarily, and how finally they had successfully destroyed the menace, and saved not just Spock and Peter, but the million inhabitants of Deneva.

Or at least that's the way he thought it had turned out. Funny that a dream could feel so real a person could start to question what had actually happened. He remembered the mission clearly. It had been over two years ago. Yet he was still flooded with feelings of grief and uncertainty.

What was odd was that he didn't think he had been that emotional about it at the time. Everything had happened so fast. First his brother was dead, his sister-in-law, then Spock infected. He didn't know if in the midst of the crisis he had actually faced the possibility that they would have to admit defeat.

Yet the nightmare had focused almost entirely on his feelings for Spock.

Spock! He felt an overwhelming need to assure himself that his friend had really recovered.

Hovering sapphires continued to observe the specimen. Alpaque allowed the being to ascend to another level of consciousness, but still prevented it from achieving complete sentience.

Kirk sat up and switched on the small camp light. The dull glow illuminated the figure on the cot on the other side of the tent.

Kirk threw off the light sheet silently, crossed the tent and knelt beside the sleeping form. He discerned the steady rise and fall of the Vulcan's chest, under the layers of thermal blankets. He lay his head on Spock's chest and felt the steady, quick heartbeat.

He looked at Spock's face, beautifully angular in the luminance. Though the eyes were open as was characteristic of the Vulcan, he appeared to be sleeping soundly.

He watched the familiar face, unlined in repose. The face became blurred and he realized his eyes had flooded again, this time with joy. He wiped them with the sleeve of his shirt. It was getting to be a very wet night.

Kirk knelt there for an indeterminate amount of time, watching the regular rise and fall of the blankets with a quiet gratification, savoring the luxury of having his friend there, alive and healthy, occasionally touching the angular brow.

Reluctant to leave Spock, he quietly lifted the covers and slid in beside his friend. He precariously balanced himself on the edge of the narrow cot, not wishing to disturb the Vulcan, but unwilling to have him out of his reach.

He turned off the lamp. All thoughts of the incongruity of his actions were driven from his mind by an overwhelming need to continually reassure himself that his friend lived pain-free. He touched the Vulcan's shoulder softly, then removed his hand and rebalanced himself half off of the cot. Face stiff with dried tears, it was with complete contentment that he drifted off to sleep.

Jim was gone.

Spock watched the tableau flicker off the platform. A transporter malfunction? Were they in space, dead?

Gone - where? Stolen. Who, what would steal them?

Not in this system. A feeling - a hunch - yes. Vulcans have hunches though they call them by other names.

He is far away. I know he is further away. Too far.

No - we must not waste time searching this system. I know he is not here.

Scott and McCoy, as formidable opponents as the vastness of space. I can do nothing if they oppose me. Nothing. The crew will follow them instead of me.

Sifting through the sands on a beach - trying to find a lost coin.

Searching for a needle in a haystack. HE IS NOT HERE! I know it! Why would you have me explain what is so clear to see!

Bickering Doctor and Engineer. I am in command.

Do not anger like a Human. Calm yourself. I need them. Scotty will help you find him. McCoy will heal him....

No! The odds of finding him - infinitesimal. All the stars in the galaxy. In the universe. The odds - Jim never cared about the odds.

He wrenched himself out of the nightmare, refusing to accept it as factuality, yet still, the grief, the sense of loss still lingered. He lay there silently in the darkness, breathing quickly. He realized the reality. Brought himself up short. Yes, it had happened. Jim and the others had been snatched thousands of light years away to Triskelion, but the Enterprise had traced the powerful beam that had taken them. Jim had gambled for his crew and won freedom for all of the Thralls. The aliens had honored the wager and released them.

But that was over a year ago. They were now on a benign planet many light years away, and Jim was soundly sleeping on the cot on the other side of the tent. He raised his head slightly to verify that.

Vaguely he became aware of a pressure against his side, and the pulse of breathing right next to him. There was not enough light filtering into the tent, even for acute Vulcan eyes. He put out his hand and felt the cool body, huddled on the edge of the narrow cot.

He wondered briefly if this could be just an extension of the nightmare. His mind still felt slightly clouded. Then groggily he decided it didn't matter. He gingerly brushed back the lock of hair that fell over the smooth

forehead, touched the cheekbone softly, traced the rounded ear. Dream or reality, it was Jim, and he felt a lightness, a joy that he was actually reluctant to allow himself to experience.

He listened with a sensuous pleasure to the regular breathing, unconsciously matching the rhythm with his own. Carefully, so as not to awaken the Human, he pulled the somnulent figure completely onto the cot and enveloped him firmly with his arms. No alien transporter beam, however powerful, would be able to snatch away his Captain now, without taking him too. With this security of mind, he allowed himself to sink gently into a comfortable slumber.

Though the Vulcan slept with eyes open, he did not see the cerulescent shimmer that hovered in the center of the tent.

"Well, Amienlar? What did you think?"

A twin cluster joined its friend, still savoring the emanations that radiated throughout the tent. "Very esoteric. At first it resisted releasing the right flavors, however, once I stimulated the proper engrams, they effused quite readily. Very intense. More so than our previous visitors. Its feelings for the other are quite strong."

"Apparently, the feelings are reciprocated. The tastes still linger."

"Yes," Alpaque agreed. "They blend delightfully," it commented, sampling the remnants of the combination. "Rich and bittersweet."

Sated, they flickered out of the temporary structure, and left the two units curled up together.

Kirk's awakening was more gentle than his accustomed shipboard wake-up call. There were no sounds outside of the tent except the canorous rustling of the wind in the trees. He blinked against the soft light of day. Shadows of the trees caused the light filtering through the material of the tent to dance across his eyes. He started to shift position and found himself unable to move - an inexorable arm was draped heavily across his chest, firmly anchoring him in place. The Vulcan's face, just centimeters from his own, black hair, usually so neat, slightly tousled from sleep - brown eyes open, but the vacant stare and slow even breathing indicated that his First Officer was still asleep.

"Spock," he spoke softly. "Wake up."

The brown eyes blinked, then focused on him and lit up in recognition.
"Jim."

"Spock," he asked, allowing a slight note of curiosity into his voice. "What are you doing here?"

Spock looked around, still slightly disoriented, then back to Kirk. "This is my cot, Captain," he pointed out.

Kirk raised his head and confirmed it for himself. "So it is," he said sheepishly. He searched his memory briefly, trying to sort out the night's blend of dreams, nightmares and realities. "Well," gently, hesitantly. "Can I get up?"

"What?" Spock finally noticed his arm locked across Kirk's chest. "Oh." He removed it slowly, as if reluctant to do so. Kirk got up, still slightly chagrined. What had happened last night? The memory was there, but it was unclear. Maybe McCoy had a point about the wisdom of sleeping in civilized quarters. This was the first time he had sleepwalked since childhood.

"After breakfast, how about, if we dismantle the tent and send the camping gear back to the ship?" Kirk suggested as he dressed. "Pretty as this planet is, another day should do for me. For the nonscientific mind, it can get a little dull."

"Agreed, Captain. Tomorrow, I should like to investigate another climatic zone."

Spock pulled on his boots, silently trying to analyze what had transpired in the last few hours. Reluctantly, he came to the conclusion that the subconscious mental experience must have been a lapse, undoubtedly attributable to his Human half. Meditation was usually sufficient to reassert the Vulcan dominance of his psyche. He resolved to remedy the situation when he was back on the ship.

Kirk prepared breakfast as Spock assembled what equipment they would need for that day. They ate without ado, conscious of the ascending sun. Kirk glanced at his timepiece. "Savarese should be here any minute." As if on cue, a shimmering pillar appeared a few meters to their right, and coalesced into the dark haired, blue clad figure of the Enterprise's resident phytologist.

"Ah, Lieutenant Savarese," Kirk said, laying down his cup of coffee. "Just in time to help us pack up everything."

Savarese smiled agreeably. "I'm pretty anxious to get started, sir - Doctor McCoy says this place is a botanist's dream."

The three of them worked companionably alongside of each other, dismantling and packing the tent. They piled together the remaining gear, holding out only a few essentials, including some sample cases. Kirk flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Scotty, get a fix on our equipment. It's at these coordinates. We won't be needing it any more."

The stacked pile shimmered with the transporter effect. Even if an observer had been interested enough to watch closely, against the bright azure sky, it would have been almost impossible to detect the additional blue sparkles caught up in the beam.

Uhura leaned back from her console and stretched out her legs. It had seemed like a long day, but not a very busy one. Very little intraship communication - and there hadn't been any calls from the landing party since early in the morning. All in all, a good day for day dreaming.

She thought of...Sulu, of all people. She seldom thought of him specifically. The slender helmsman was like a fixture on the bridge. He had been with the Enterprise longer than she had, and his presence gave her a solid feeling of stability. When the Captain and Mr. Spock were off the bridge, there was never any uncertainty about his ability to handle his station.

As a helmsman, he was the best. As a friend, he was always there, competent and compassionate. She remembered with gratitude how supportive he had been at the funeral they had held for the Captain in Tholian space, when they had believed he was dead - Sulu at her side, practically holding her up when she was overcome with grief.

The man was the most stable she had ever known. Not the kind to run off and leave his post. Except once - that time the PSI 2000 virus had contaminated the ship - she remembered his running through the corridors, chest bared, brandishing his sword, shouting, "Richelou!" At the time, even though she was terrified that the ship would fall into the disintegrating planet, a fraction of her mind had noted what a nice compact physique Sulu had. How adorable his fine muscled body was, glistening with sweat. The thought had briefly crossed her mind that given the right circumstances - not then of course - it would be nice to have the opportunity to touch it.

Except the professional in her would never allow that to occur. Must keep the relationship with her associates strictly platonic. Still....

She finished her reverie and checked her panel. Naturally, there were no incoming calls from Starfleet, but she liked to verify that before she ended her shift.

Sulu stared at the viewscreen, focused on an aerial view of Saiph IV. It could have been Earth, in another time, unmarred by the scars of civilization - lush foliage, botanist's paradise. Doctor McCoy had said there was no animal life. Fascinating to consider the possibilities of a totally vegetarian ecology, undisturbed by predators.

Interesting to contemplate what it would be like to live in the planetary garden. Like a paradise. But a paradise should be shared - with one other.

Who? Well, this was his fantasy. No one too serious. Janice? No, she loved only the Captain. Uhura?

Yes, Uhura could live in the fantasy. Beautiful sepia goddess, she would sing for him amidst the trees - her laughing, lilting songs - and they would dance together in the glade, her body fitting neatly against his.

"Plan to take my shift too, Sulu?" He was abruptly brought out of the daydream by his relief, Lieutenant Jackson Cary, who was now regarding him teasingly.

"No, I think I'd better get out of here before I fall asleep on my panel." The helmsman sighed. "This place is so peaceful, it's getting hard to concentrate."

"Sweet dreams," Cary wished him as he took over his seat.

Sulu found himself in the turbolift with only one other passenger. Uhura said, "Dining room," and the turbolift started to move.

He looked at her and hoped she couldn't read minds. His face began to warm up and he looked away from her, hoping she wouldn't notice. "Hot in here," he commented.

"Why so it is," she agreed, and he wondered at how melodious her voice was, even in ordinary speech.

"Sulu," she spoke softly. He turned toward her and swallowed hard. Her eyes, shining black pools, stared hard at him. How pretty she was. If only...but she would never allow herself to be more than a friend, and her friendship was worth more than passion with any other woman.



"Uhura," his deep voice was so husky, it was almost too low for Human auditory range. He found himself lost in the depths of her eyes and didn't particularly want to find himself again. He reached to touch her, a touch he had always longed for...

Abruptly the doors of the turbolift whipped open, revealing the Captain and First Officer, just back from the transporter room. Sulu's hand froze in midair.

Uhura's eyes refocused and she gathered herself together, more quickly than he could have. "Coming to dinner, Sulu?"

"Yes," he answered, and followed her as the two senior officers crossed them to enter the turbolift. He walked beside her down the passage to the main dining room, unaware of the twin clusters of blue sparkles that had also emerged from the lift.

The two azure spangles of light hovered in the corridor, gazing fondly at the retreating units they had just sampled. "Delightful," said Amienlar, "fruity and light."

"Yes, they were quite refreshing," Alpaque agreed. "This entire day has been most enjoyable - what a variety of flavors."

"Yes we have encountered no others of the species I sampled this morning."

"Was it very different in sapidity, Amienlar?"

The entity hesitated, coruscating in thought. "I don't know if it was a phyletic or individual difference. It was actually quite intense - exquisitely piquant with melliflous undertones." Amienlar flickered with decisiveness. "You must try it, Alpaque. My description cannot do it justice."

Alpaque glittered enthusiastically. "And you must try the unit I had last night. Rich and well seasoned. Most delectable." It glanced toward the turbolift. "I believe the two units just ascended to the next level," he added, starting to rise.

"Wait," Amienlar restrained him. "They move about constantly. Let us wait until they are in a state of repose in order to savor them more fully."

"Of course you are quite right, Amienlar. And here, I haven't even finished digesting that last sample."

Amienlar, renowned gourmet, admonished, "It is always wise to completely metabolize before experiencing new tastes."

Vulcans were dying. The Captain watched dispassionately as they died. Four hundred Vulcans. The cloud hungered. They writhed as the life was drained from them. And he watched.

A choice. Someone must pay the price. You must choose. You, Captain James T. Kirk. McCoy or Spock?

They are both my friends. I cannot sacrifice either.

CHOOSE! It is the price for your SHIP! Your universe.

Jim chose. "Bones must be the one." The words formed in his mouth and exited silently.

"I'm sorry, Spock," said the Captain. "You must be the one."

"NO!" Jim cried out, his words floating silently on air, "I choose McCoy!"

But the Captain ruled his voice. And sacrificed one final Vulcan.

Spock left. Betrayed. The cloud would have its final sacrifice. One more Vulcan.

The Captain watched the Vulcan die. Dispassionately. Watched him strangle. Gasp for air. Brown eyes roll back. Blood-Viridian hue - gushes quietly from the open mouth. Jim cried. Silently.

He sat up suddenly. "Whew." That had been a bad one. His body had broken out in a cold sweat. It wasn't often that he had nightmares, and this was two nights in a row. And both times about Spock.

Spock! Though he knew intellectually that it had just been a dream and Spock was safe in the next cabin, he was gripped with an overwhelming need to confirm it for his own peace of mind. The thought of losing the Vulcan left him with a curious ache in his throat.

Kirk started to press the intercom and then stopped himself. He lay back again, this time with no intention of going back to sleep. The thought of

Spock, engulfed in that giant amoeba still tormented him. Lost. Forever. At the time, he had barely had time to truly experience the loss of his friend. He had been so caught up in the battle to destroy the immense one-celled organism. Why now, almost two years later, did his mind choose to dredge up the incident and cause him to play it over again, this time focusing only on the terror of losing Spock? The thought of it obliterating him into nothingness as it had with the other 400 Vulcans aboard the Intrepid. This nightmare left him unsure if Spock had actually made it.

He hesitantly reached again for the intercom and once again halted himself. He glanced at the chronometer, numbers glaring orange and luminous - 0142. Spock would be sound asleep by now. He knew Spock would probably be concerned, worried, and Kirk was reluctant to disturb his rest when he would see him first thing in the morning.

"Captain." He jumped, startled at the familiar baritone voice and wondered if he had inadvertently hit the knob. But his hand was nowhere near it. It was Spock calling him. Spock was alive! He almost laughed aloud at himself. Of course Spock was alive.

"Kirk here," he answered.

"Captain, I regret disturbing your sleep, but I wish to see you at your earliest convenience." Was there a tremor in the deep baritone?"

Kirk swallowed hard to contain the joy that was welling up in his throat. "I wasn't asleep. Please...come right over."

He buzzed Spock in, half a minute later. With the appearance of the tall Vulcan, he felt something in his stomach unknot. He hadn't even known it had been there.

He sat quietly, drinking in the sight of his friend. And Spock was looking at him with an expression very unfamiliar on the Vulcan face. The deep brown eyes stared at him silently a moment, then Spock came over and layed his hand alongside Kirk's face.

Kirk looked into the deep eyes and realized that his own expression was mirrored in them. "Captain, I realize that it is totally irrational and illogical, but I felt an overwhelming compulsion to confirm the continuation of your existence."

He lay his hand on top of Spock's and grasped it. Finally, the fears evaporated, and the hollow feeling in his chest was flooded with an almost intangible warmth.

He sighed in satisfaction, and did not let go of Spock's hand. "Have you been having nightmares too, Spock?"

Spock looked puzzled. "I am not very familiar with the experience. It was...a mental reenactment of an uncomfortable incident. I believe the term 'nightmare' is appropriate." His eyes unfocused, remembering. "It was on Planet 892 IV" Seeing Kirk's incomprehension, he enlightened him. "Rome - the 'son worshipers' - gladiatorial games."

"Oh yes," he said, recollecting the planet.

"After we were captured, Doctor McCoy and I were placed in a holding cell of sorts. We did not know where you had been taken. I have studied Earth's history - and this cultural development seemed parallel. The tortures of the ancient Romans...." he faltered, "were extremely barbaric. When one is constrained from action, ones imagination is given free rein."

Kirk reflected ruefully that in those very moments, he himself had been constrained in the arms of Drusilla, a beautiful slave girl. "Spock, I...."

"My dream, the reenactment seemed as vivid - perhaps more so. McCoy and I, locked in that cell - with thoughts of you - facing unknown dangers...." The normally composed voice had taken on an edge; the normally lucid eyes were growing black and anomalous.

"It didn't happen!" Kirk rose to his feet and shook him slightly, in an effort to break the mood. He spoke lightly, "I'm embarrassed to say that you and McCoy were worrying needlessly about me."

"Yet you had been slated for execution," he pointed out.

"Yes. But it's over now."

"Actually, I haven't felt myself since we entered this system. We've both been kind of thrown off balance lately; first with all those run ins with the Romulans, and then running Noah's Ark through the Rigel system."

"It has been disorienting," Spock agreed.

"I think once we get back to our normal routine, sleeping regular hours, we'll both feel a lot better." Kirk glanced at the chronometer again. "I don't really feel like going back to sleep right now." He brightened. "How about a midnight snack?"

"I'm not particularly hungry, Captain..." he hesitated, "but I suppose something light."

Kirk grabbed his arm cheerfully, and steered him toward the door. "Come on, Spock. Just to be sociable."

The two figures strode quietly through the corridors, oblivious to anything but each other. It was one of those too rare times when just being with each other was enough. No red alerts, no duty rosters, no high pressure chess competition and no interruptions from other crew members. The corridors seemed almost eerie, dimly lit for what Earthlings nicknamed the 'graveyard shift'.

"I feel ravenous," Kirk commented. "I could eat a horse."

"I was unaware that people of your cultural background consumed equines."

Kirk glanced at him, not certain whether to take him seriously. "Just a figure of speech, Spock."

Neither seemed aware of the two scintillating clusters that followed them into Rec Room III.

Kirk strode to the selector and punched in his choice without hesitation. Spock took a little longer. They picked up their trays and seated themselves at one of the smaller tables.

Kirk took a bite of his sandwich and looked curiously at what Spock was eating. "What is that?"

"Antarean vegetable bullion."

"You like that stuff?"

"Yes, it's quite good." At the Captain's doubting look, he offered, "Try some?"

Kirk took it and tasted it, and seemed to consider it thoughtfully, "Vulcan taste buds must be vastly different than Human."

"It is quite nutritious, Captain."

"I suppose so." He took a drink.

Spock paused a moment and then asked, "Captain, you asked me if I had been 'having nightmares too'. I would take that to imply that at least one other person has experienced a nightmare recently."

Kirk smiled. "Me. I'm glad you called when you did. I was just trying to get up the nerve to call you. Quite a coincidence."

"Hmm." Spock had his own reservations about the Human concept of coincidence.

"It was the second nightmare I had about you in the last two days. Tonight it was about the giant amoeba that wiped out the Intrepid. Last night about that parasite on Deneva that killed my brother and sister-in-law. Both times I almost lost you." He looked directly at Spock, hazel eyes almost opalescent in the soft light in the soft light. "Maybe my nightmares are trying to tell me something. I don't face it from day to day, but statistically, the odds of both of us returning alive from the five year mission approach zero."

Spock looked at him hard.

"I know, you're the one that quotes the odds - you know the dangers, especially for higher ranked personnel. We've both seen close friends die, or worse - Gary Mitchell, Chris Pike, Matt Decker.

"But this is one I had worked out myself. Years ago. Had to use the computer - I can't do these things in my head like you do. Probably neglected to feed in essential data."

"It is close enough." It was Kirk's turn to stare at him. "I too have worked out the odds. But I have learned, from you, just how meaningless they actually are."

"Do you think then that we really have a chance of surviving each new encounter? Living happily ever after?"

"I do not know. But this is the life we have chosen for ourselves. We must believe that we have a reasonable chance to survive or we cannot continue to function."

"You're right." He clasped Spock's shoulder firmly. "But I have to acknowledge the possibilities. At least enough that I will have no regrets when it's time to cash in my chips."

"Cash in yor chips?" Spock asked, puzzled.

"Kick the bucket. Buy the farm. Croak," he said teasingly, almost reluctant to speak plainly, then relented, "Decease."

"I see. English is such a colorful language. I doubt that I will ever absorb all of its colloquialisms."

The teasing look left Kirk's eyes. "But you do know what I mean. These nightmares - they're uncomfortable...but it's a small price to pay...for a reminder of what you really mean to me." His gaze softened as he faced his friend.

Spock felt the need to express his feelings, yet the words were difficult - a conflict between the Vulcan discipline that forbade any displays of emotionalism and his Human half? Or was that dichotomy a myth - wasn't it really just himself, apart from any racial compulsions that felt the closeness? "I too feel the need to express the worth of your friendship to me." He looked at the wall, then forced himself to meet the other's eyes. "I dreamed that you were gone - beyond reach... perhaps dead. Once again I was alone...as I was before our friendship. I have spent most of my life alone, and never was aware of any lack. It was not a difficulty before. I have always functioned efficiently. Yet now, the thought of continuing a life without you - to be alone once again - the desolation...."

"I'm here!" Kirk clasped him firmly by both arms. "And I'm not going anywhere without you. At least not tonight."

Spock looked at the familiar face - a face he had engraved on his heart - and the empty hole inside of him was filled with a tangible warmth and joy.

Chief Engineer Scott faced his commanding officer with some apprehension. He had not expected the twenty-four hour period on routine patrol to be any particular challenge to his command abilities. However, it had proved to be just that. "I don't know if something's funny with the crew, or I'm making a mountain out of a molehill," he began.

Kirk tried to reassure him. "Scotty, you're the best Chief Engineer in the fleet...."

"Aye, I can handle engines, but dealing with people...." he shook his head ruefully.

"You've never had a problem dealing with the engineering staff. Why don't

you just get to the point?"

"Even my own staff is acting funny."

Kirk found it difficult to take Scott's misgivings too seriously and attributed them to one of Scott's periodic gloomy moods, which could easily be remedied with a brief shore leave. "Scotty, the crew didn't mutiny...."

"Sometimes I think outright defiance is easier to handle than this...shiftlessness. People showing up late at their posts, not paying proper attention to their jobs... Captain, it could be hazardous."

"My yeoman hasn't brought me a report on time the entire day."

"I'm sure the newer crewmembers...."

"Not just the new ones, Jim. We almost touched atmosphere this morning when Sulu took his eyes off the helm."

This sounded serious. "Sulu?"

Scott nodded. "Aye. The others too. I don't mean to be a tell-tale, but I've had to put several crewmembers on report." He handed Kirk the printout of his personal log. "You take a look, Jim, and see if it's more than the usual. I'm just glad you're back aboard and I can stop babysitting a bunch of star struck adolescents."

Kirk watched the disgruntled Scotsman leave, and drummed his fingers impatiently on the table. Was Scott venting his own frustrations in petty dissatisfaction with the crew? but the Engineer had always appeared completely content with the position. Kirk sighed and began to read his third in command's report of the previous day. His eyes widened in disbelief as he read.

The turbolift paused enroute to the bridge and McCoy joined Kirk and Spock. The medical officer looked at Spock with curiosity. "I thought you were going to lead the landing party today."

"I am, Doctor. However, before I transport down, I will correlate my tricorder readings of yesterday with the ship's sensors. Today I will be investigating the planet's tropical zone - it should prove interesting. Thus far, neither the tricorder nor sensor probes have shown indications of zoic life."

"Tropical zone, eh? That should prove pleasant for you, Spock."

"It will be a rare opportunity to relax my internal temperature controls outside of my cabin," he agreed. "Though it is far from being as arid as Vulcan."

Kirk regarded the Vulcan with fondness. How often he took for granted the everyday sacrifice of comfort his friend made, just to stay in the same room with him. Last night had cost him a bit of sleep, but he felt a renewed appreciation for what he had. Spock met his eye and he felt the unspoken message pass between them.

Oblivious to the sentiment, McCoy rattled on, "Well, I sure don't mind passing up this expedition. Temperatures on this planet's tropical zone average 50 C. It's a wonder any life survives."

"You exaggerate, Doctor. Human life can exist quite healthfully at that temperature. It is merely a matter of adaptation."

"Listen to this," McCoy said to Kirk with exasperation. "Now he's givin' medical opinions on Human life."

Spock began to protest. "Doctor, I merely..." but the argument was lost to Kirk as the turbolift doors swished open. He sighed in relief.

Scotty looked up from the engineering station and greeted them. "Captain, I noticed yer name isna on the landing party roster f'r t'day."

Kirk made his way to his command chair and seated himself. "I decided to leave Saiph IV to the scientists from here on. I'm confident that the planet is free of any physical hazards, despite Marque's report. Besides, I have to catch up on some paperwork."

He looked over Chekov and Sulu's shoulders, verifying the stability of orbit. Sulu commented, "I heard this planet has a fantastic variety of plant life, Captain."

"Yes, it does," he answered absently, then remembered the helmsman's penchant for botany. "Would you like to be included in the landing party, Mr. Sulu?" At Sulu's answering grin, he said, "Be in the transporter room at 0830."

"Yes, sir."

"Here's your paperwork, Captain," his yeoman said almost a little too cheerfully, handing him a clipboard overfull with papers. He smothered a groan.

Kirk skimmed through the departmental reports until midway through the stack he got to personnel's. He rifled through the papers with increasing puzzlement. "Three of them," he muttered. "This doesn't make sense. And the transfers, too." He sat down and absently drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair.

The forms he clutched - glared at - three requests for marriages between crewmen. Usual procedure was to have McCoy give a psychological and physical evaluation, forward the requests through Starfleet Command, and barring complications the couple could be married within two months. Nothing wrong with that. Theoretically, it shouldn't interfere with their work - in actuality, it often led to requests for ground posts.

He turned to his medical officer. "Take a look at this, Bones. Three requests for permission for matrimony."

McCoy looked at him with mild surprise. "Is that a problem?"

"Taken individually, I'd say no. But this is as many as I get in a year. And I've also received four requests for interdepartmental transfers. I usually only get about one a month."

"Well, we've been in space for three years. Maybe some relationships are just starting to blossom."

"Maybe. But something doesn't feel right about it." He heard the echo of Marque's misgivings in his own voice.

"It sounds innocent enough, if you take them individually. But combine these three with the two women from the Constellation and it makes me wonder if this could be more than a coincidence."

"Captain," Scott spoke up for the first time, "where I come from, we have a saying. Once is happenstance, twice is coincidence, three times and it's enemy action."

Spock looked at the engineer intently. "Mr. Scott, are you proposing that alien agents are deliberately causing personality changes in the crew?"

Scott looked slightly sheepish. "I was speaking figuratively, Mr. Spock. What I meant was there might be something physical causing this behavior. Perhaps a virus like we picked up on PSI 2000. That would be more McCoy's line than mine."

"I took blood samples and readings from the Captain, Mr. Spock and myself

after we beamed back to the ship. I see no evidence of viral infection. I haven't had an urge to get married today. And it's not likely to spread throughout the crew if we don't have it." McCoy leaned back on his heels. "Personally, I think you're making too much of this, Jim. The kids are obviously in love. Probably just spring fever."

Spock looked at him with incomprehension. "Doctor, climatic conditions on this ship do not fluctuate. There is no 'spring' on the Enterprise. And while you may have been emotionally stimulated by the idyllic atmosphere of the planet, the applicants were not in the landing party."

Kirk stepped in before McCoy could muster a retort. "What other possibilities are there, besides coincidence?"

The science officer considered thoughtfully. "Behavior patterns can be modified by infections, as Mr. Scott suggested, or the use of drugs. Other possibilities are radiation from the surface of the planet, or a distortion of the fabric of space itself."

"And?" Kirk questioned impatiently.

"I detect no such radiation or spacial distortion." The Vulcan did not seem particularly concerned about the situation. "It is quite possible that there is a correlation between the six. Perhaps they are friends and contemplate a joint venture, such as the colonization of a planet. Doctor McCoy will have to verify that there are no infections or drugs affecting them before the requests can be forwarded."

Scotty commented with some pride. "At least my engines aren't influenced by a virus," then looked nervous. "Though maybe I should guard them carefully against young fools under the influence of one."

Kirk smiled tolerantly. "You can get back to your 'wee bairns' now, Scotty." With a look of gratitude, the engineer left the bridge. After a minute, McCoy also drifted back to Sickbay.

"Mr. Sulu, be prepared for a hot day. Mr. Spock will be investigating the tropical zone. Fifty degrees centigrade."

The helmsman gulped, then smiled weakly. "Just the price you've got to pay for knowledge." Shortly afterward, he and Spock left for the transporter. Kirk applied himself to the remaining reports.

Nurse Christine Chapel had nearly completed her routine rounds of the

animals in Laboratory II. The lab was almost filled to capacity due to the many specimens from the Rigel system, and the entire Life Science Department had been putting in extra hours in their care and feeding.

Christine enjoyed the extra duties. Many of the animals were attractive and similar in appearance to those of Earth.

She paused outside one of the tanks and observed the rose-colored aquatic creatures they had gathered from the seas of Rigel 3. Adapting well to their captivity, they enjoyed chasing each other around the large aquarium.

After Christine had finished feeding the last creature, she took a final survey of the room. She sighed, then walked to one cage in the far corner of the lab. Chapel had been drawn to the small mammal since the survey team had brought it on board eight days ago. Though its physiology was vastly different from Terran felines, it reminded her of a favorite cat she had owned as a child.

Unnoticed, an ultramarine cluster formed nearby.

"Topaz," she murmured. That had been the name of her cat which had been the identical tawnycolor. Bright, golden eyes met hers. "I could almost believe that you understand me." The eyes blinked, but held their stare. "Just like Toppy." Christine continued to gaze longingly at the creature, remembering how pleasant it had been to stroke soft fur. And Topaz had always responded immediately with a purr of contentment.

"Nurse Chapel!" Startled, her hands dropped from the latch of the cage. She turned to meet the anxious expression of her superior. "Christine, were you about to unfasten that cage without tranquilizing that animal?"

Still bewildered, she could not formulate an answer. She shook her head vaguely, not sure if she was conveying a yes or a no.

McCoy softened his voice in concern. "Chris, I didn't mean to yell, but frankly, you scared the pants off of me. You know what those Rigellian sand cats can do if you breathe on 'em wrong." He suppressed a shudder. "I'd hate to find my best Nurse with her throat ripped."

"I...." She looked back at the animal now calmly licking its forefeet, unsheathing the knifelike claws for better access. 'Toppy wouldn't hurt me.' The sandcat frowned lazily, revealing the razor edged teeth. 'But this isn't Toppy.' She put her hand to her head to steady herself. "Doctor, maybe I'd better spend a little less time in zoology."

He put his arm over her shoulder and guided her out of the lab. "Sure, Chris. I've probably been overworking you again."

Kirk stopped by Sickbay after lunch. He waited for McCoy to finish a medical log entry, then asked, "How did things go?"

McCoy looked blank a moment, then said, "Oh, you mean those crewmen who wanted to get married. No drugs or infections. I asked them if they were going in for some sort of joint venture, and they said they didn't even know each other very well."

"Oh. Well, I guess it's just a coincidence. It's only three of them."

McCoy looked worried. "I dunno. One of the crewwomen, not one of the ones I examined, came in this morning and requested I remove the contraceptive implant. Said she's in love with someone in security and wants to assure that his line will continue."

Kirk stared at him. "You didn't remove it, did you?"

"I told her to think about it for a few days. But it is her right."

"Yes, it is her right." He looked thoughtful. "They weren't even on the planet. It can't be the food. You sure it isn't some kind of a virus?"

"Nothing I could detect. And the six crewmen, plus the one this morning seemed perfectly rational."

"It seems more and more likely that some alien influence is altering the behavior of the crew." He stepped over to the intercom and punched the unit decisively. "Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge here."

"Uhura, inform Mr. Spock that I want the landing party to beam back aboard immediately."

"Aye, Captain."

Kirk waited until Sulu and Savarese were on the turbolift to tell Spock of the new development. "Spock, one of the crewwomen requested that McCoy remove the implant. She wants to have a child."

"I assume that he did not honor her request?"

"No, of course not."

"I also surmise that he did not find evidence of drugs or infection in the six applicants."

"No. He's stumped. Got any new ideas?"

"There is one possibility that I did not mention before," he said as he headed for the lab. "A noncorporeal body which manipulates and feeds on emotions is not unprecedented, even in our experience. We have encountered an entity which engineered a situation aboard this ship designed to stimulate and perpetuate feelings of animosity. On Argelius II we encountered the noncorporeal body 'Redjack' which fed on terror. It is quite probable that an entity exists which feeds on more benevolent emotions, such as geniality and affection. It would be quite logical behavior for such a creature to stimulate friendships - thus the requests for transfers - and to encourage couples to further develop their relationships."

"You think that this is what we've got on board? An emotional parasite?"

"Parasites is more likely, Captain," the Vulcan answered mildly.

"Parasites?"

"I would speculate that there are at least two of them, since you and I were affected at precisely the same time last night."

He looked at the science officer in surprise. "You think those nightmares were caused by these noncorporeal beings. Couldn't just be...." he hesitated over a word he was using all too frequently lately, "coincidence?"

"Highly unlikely, Captain, especially in light of the other evidence. While it is conceivable that you could be experiencing a psychological dilemma that would cause recurring nightmares, under normal circumstances, I would not."

Kirk sighed. "At least two of them. Wreaking havoc with my crew. You know what happens once crewmen start marrying? They don't remain on starships very long. And at this rate, my entire crew will be married within two months."

"Unlikely, as currently only 22.57% of the crew is female."

Kirk looked at him impatiently. "Spare me the statistics, Mr. Spock. Just locate whatever is disrupting my crew."

"I will endeavor to do so, Captain."

He followed Spock into the laboratory. Spock went to one of the consoles, opened the panel and made some adjustments.

"What are you doing?"

"I am adjusting our sensors to systematically scan for different frequencies of life energy," he said, looking remarkably unworried, considering there was a high probability that aliens had invaded the ship. Though the Vulcan was always inscrutable Kirk could usually read him somewhat. But this time, he could swear Spock looked slightly amused.

He looked at him helplessly. Could this alien influence have warped even Spock's impeccable judgement? Kirk was slightly tempted to haul off and slug Spock and see if he could rattle that bland composure, but thought better of it.

"Captain - my sensors have picked up two unidentified energy forms aboard this ship," he looked up, "they are in your cabin."

Startled, he asked, "Inside my cabin?" Losing his voice, he mouthed the words.

"Affirmative."

He strode to the intercom. "Security to the Captain's cabin." Instinctively he felt for his phaser.

"I doubt that security or your phaser will be effective against these life forms, Captain."

"Come on," he said impatiently.

The two security officers were already waiting outside of Kirk's door by the time he and Spock arrived. McCoy was also nearby. "What's up, Jim?"

"Spock has located some alien energy forms aboard this ship. And tracked them here. Could be the cause of the unusual behavior."

"Shall I try the door now, sir?" asked one of the security people.

"Yes. And be careful. We don't know what we're dealing with."

The security officers drew their phasers, leveled them carefully, and cautiously opened the door. The light automatically blinked on. Kirk motioned the others behind him, and he carefully inched into the room, phaser drawn.

The room appeared no different than it had that morning. Tidy, bed neatly made, books lined up neatly on the shelves - pictures all level on the walls.

"Captain," Spock said, "if I may." He flipped off the light switch.

In the dark, it suddenly became easy to discern the two clusters of blue sparkles. He flipped the light back on. Now that they were aware of the clusters, it was possible to see them hovering against the blue wall.

Kirk turned to Spock. "This is what's been causing the strange behavior? The nightmares?"

"Nightmares?" McCoy asked.

"Yes, nightmares. Spock and I both experienced some extremely realistic dreams both on and off the surface of the planet. And these entities are probably the culprits."

Phaser drawn, Kirk strode over to the cluster hovering over his bed. He motioned for the security men to stand back. He saw that there were indeed two almost identical clusters of sparkling blue lights. "Who are you?" he demanded angrily. "What are you doing to my crew?"

The cluster cringed away from him and faded slightly, leaving him with the irrational feeling that he had done something abominable, like kicking a puppy. He shook the feeling off and turned to Spock. "Can we communicate with these...creatures?"

"I believe that is possible." He laid the universal translator on Kirk's desk, setting up a field. "This is the modification we used on Gamma Canaris for communication with the Companion. It should be effective."

Kirk set down his phaser and approached the clusters slowly, this time keeping the anger out of his voice. "Who are you?"

The cluster on the left seemed to gather its courage and regained its former radiance. "I am Amienlar. And this is Alpaque." The voice was pleasant, the universal translator conveying that it was young and androgynous.



"Are you native to the planet below?"

Amienlar continued to act as their 'spokesman'. "Like yourselves, we are scouting out this planet for colonization. We arrived three cycles ago."

"Then you have first claim. Well, we wouldn't have disputed your right to it."

"The planet does not provide adequate sustenance. We had almost decided to abandon it."

"I don't see how you can say it doesn't provide proper sustenance," McCoy blurted out. "The planet is a virtual treasury of nutrients."

"For our kind," Amienlar added. "However, with the arrival of others of your species two cycles ago, we found it possible to obtain the proper nutrients. We had thought that if your species should colonize this planet, it might be possible for ours to exist alongside."

"Proper nutrients?" Kirk asked, turning to Spock. "Our nightmares?"

The science officer nodded, as if having his suspicions confirmed. "The nightmares themselves were not the 'nutrients' these entities sought, but rather the feelings of friendship that they stimulated."

"You are correct, Spock," Amienlar answered warmly. "We did not intend to cause your species unhappiness. In most of the samples we have taken, it was possible to obtain the desired emanations without any pain. Yours and the Captains were more difficult, however the emanations were most intense."

Alpaque added in a voice that was almost identical, "We do not cause the occurrence of what you call love and friendship. We only utilize what is already there."

Kirk looked at Spock and wondered if this clinical discussion of his emotions was as uncomfortable to the Vulcan as it was to him. He turned back to the blue sparkles. "Listen, Amienlar, you just can't go around feeding on people's emotions. This kind of thing is wreaking havoc with my crew. I've got matrimony and transfer requests coming out of my ears and we've only been here for two days. I'm running a starship, not some kind of catering service."

"We're sorry." Amienlar's young voice was sad. "We have no wish to cause your species distress. We will abandon this planet."

"It is just difficult for us to understand why beings that are capable of creating love would not wish to experience it," Alpaque added.

Kirk looked at the two clusters helplessly. He looked at Spock's impassive face. There was no support there. "It's not that we don't wish to experience love. It's just that there's a time and a place for everything, and this isn't it." It seemed logical. Why did he feel like a heel? He murmured under his breath, "A time and a place...yes. This isn't, but what is?" He snapped his fingers. "A honeymoon! That would be the time and place."

McCoy grinned broadly. "And second honeymoons."

Kirk turned to his science officer. "Mr. Spock, do you see any problems with utilizing this planet if couples understand that their emotions may be 'borrowed' for benevolent purposes?"

"I see no problems as long as visitors are adequately prepared. It has the potential to be an extremely symbiotic relationship; providing sustenance for their species, and an interesting experience for yours."

"Mine?"

"Well, I hardly think that many Vulcans would choose to vacation on what I am certain travel agents will shortly dub the 'Love Planet'."

Kirk looked at him speculatively for a minute, then turned back to the entities. "As Mr. Spock has mentioned, travel agents will soon be staking out this planet and within a few months, you should receive people that are in a very receptive state for your influence."

The blue lights brightened. "We look forward to more contact with your culture. You seem to represent a very civilized people."

Kirk glanced at the reports again. "McCoy seems to think there are no harmful psychological effects from this 'experience'," he commented, then focused on his First Officer.

"That appears to be the case," Spock agreed. "However, these life forms do tend to inspire behavior that is...inappropriate in a military situation."

Kirk smiled. "They seem agreeable enough to modifying their approach. Do you think they're intelligent enough to handle the distinction?"

"I foresee no problems in that regard. I have included a recommendation in my report, suggesting that their planet of origin be visited, and be invited to join the Federation."

Kirk closed the report and folded his arms. He looked thoughtfully across the desk at Spock. "There is one thing that I haven't quite resolved in my own mind least, Mr. Spock. Perhaps you could help me."

"I am, of course, at your disposal."

"Doesn't it seem...odd to you that of the one-hundred and thirty-seven people interviewed, only two reported more than one experience. Do you think that's just coincidental?"

"In any situation, the elements of chance come into play, Captain..." the Vulcan cleared his throat, "however, in this case that is unlikely, as Amienlar and Alpaque are discerning beings."

"Exactly. Then they had a reason to come back to us. I don't want to tell you how to do your job, but isn't that something that should be scientifically examined?"

"I did question them as to their reasons. They attempted to explain the process, however. I could only approximate their terminology," he shifted uncomfortably. "Basically, they said we 'tasted' better than the others."

"Oh." Kirk paused, nonplussed. He studied the folder in front of him, bending the pages. "I've suspected...our friendship is different...than most." He looked up, wondering if he had said too much.

To his relief, Spock met his eyes calmly, "I have also suspected that our rapport was somewhat unique, though I had no objective data to support that theory."

Kirk grinned. "Just better not let McCoy get hold of that data."

Spock looked rueful. "I have no wish to arm the Doctor with ammunition to be used against me in our verbal bouts."

Suddenly Kirk understood clearly what those bouts were all about. McCoy continuously tried to make Spock admit his feelings and Spock obstinately refused to give an inch. However, it was not the fear of being teased by McCoy that kept Spock being stubbornly on guard.

Kirk remembered a prevailing childhood myth - when you make a wish, whether it was on a star or a cake full of birthday candles, you don't tell anyone, or it won't come true. In a way, that was what he and Spock were doing. They both knew they shared something out of the ordinary but had been afraid to speak of it, for fear it would vanish. Or lose its magic.

Well, maybe there was something to childhood myths after all. Maybe it was better not to speak of it directly. "Well, I for one will feel a lot more relaxed once we get those hungry beings off of the ship. I've had enough of being a smorgasbord. 'These feelings are ours, private. Not for McCoy or sparkling aliens to feed upon.'

"Indeed. I find I have a decided preference for dealing with corporeal life forms."

"Good. Then I need have no fear of losing my science officer to the....uh...Love Planet?" he teased.

Spock threw him an indignant look. "I don't believe I need to dignify that with an answer, Captain Kirk."

Kirk was grinning at him. "Perhaps we should join our 'guests' before their departure. They are scheduled to be beamed to the planet's surface in four minutes."

They proceeded to the transporter room. Kirk still wondered about Amienlar and Alpaque's planet of origin and how they travelled through interstellar space, but he found Spock's report on their scientific concepts impossible to comprehend. The Enterprise was principally designed to deal with Humanoid life forms - a ship devoted to scientific exploration was better equipped to deal in depth with other life forms.

Kirk and Spock watched the two hovering over the transporter pads, sparkles on top of sparkles, then fade. Kirk let out a sigh of relief. As they returned to the bridge, he said, "Conclusions, Mr. Spock?"

The science officer looked thoughtful. "A fascinating life form, representing a unique culture. They might possibly make a fine addition to the Federation."

He continued an earlier subject as they came onto the bridge. "So you don't think a Vulcan couple would choose to honeymoon on this planet?"

Spock repressed a shudder at the thought. "Vulcan 'honeymoons' have

entirely too much emotion as it is."

"I suppose you're right," Kirk said, amused. "Well, we have a big sector to explore. Mr. Sulu, take her out of orbit, warp factor one."



*To see her twinkling lights go dead
And know she's mine no more
To know I've steered her to her death
In this, her final war.*

*In years gone past, I've saved her true
And thought she'd live past me
But now I see her fading fast
And face reality.*

*She's seen evil forces come and go
And new cadets she trained
She knew the feeling of defeat
And yet she still remained.*

*But now as I see her turn to ash
Her fire is in my eyes
There will never be another ship
To replace my Enterprise.*



Renee Diane Volker

PROCRASTINATION

Marion McChesney

"You haven't told him yet?" McCoy asked incredulously.

Kirk shook his head. "No. I just couldn't."

McCoy couldn't believe what he was hearing. "How come Sarek or the Vulcan healers haven't told him?"

"Sarek said it wasn't their place to do so." Kirk sat down, put his elbows on the desk, and rested his chin in the palms of his hands. "I can't wait much longer, Bones," he mumbled. He looked up. "They're releasing him tomorrow. How the hell am I going to tell him?" His voice was filled with despair.

"Calm down, Jim. Spock will understand. Don't worry about it."

Kirk shook his head, his voice quiet. "You don't understand."

"Jim, sure he's going to be upset, but Spock trusts you. Don't you think you're overreacting?" He touched the Admiral's shoulder.

Kirk hesitated, then looking into McCoy's eyes, replied blankly, "No."

McCoy threw up his arms. "I give up! Have it your own way." The room was silent for a moment. Then the doctor asked, "Well...when are you going to do it?"

Kirk considered the possibilities. Since no time was better than any,

there was no point in waiting any longer. "Now, I guess."

Dragging himself from his seat as though the universe rested on his shoulders, he moved toward the door. "See you later," he mumbled. "I hope."

McCoy watched him go. When the door had at last closed behind Kirk, the doctor shook his head. Of all that had recently happened, the task of telling Spock would probably create the least problem. Yet in this incident, Kirk was responding like a naughty little boy. McCoy sighed. Well, maybe he needed to be that for now.

The Place of Healing near Mount Seleya was only a short distance from Sarek's home - too short a distance for the Admiral. Although stalling wouldn't make it easier, he had hoped to drag it out a little longer.

Sarek was waiting in the reception area when he arrived. Rising from his seat, he approached Kirk, greeting him with the Vulcan salute. "Admiral. I trust that you are well."

"Quite well, thank you." Shifting from one foot to the other he asked hesitantly, "And Spock?"

"Fully recovered. The Healers will release him tomorrow."

"Yes, I know. That's why I'm here. Before he leaves I must tell him about the ship."

Sarek stared at him. "I fail to understand why you have waited so long. It is quite illogical. You were only delaying the inevitable."

"Ambassador, hasn't there ever been a time in your life when you've dreaded the idea of telling someone something?"

"No," Sarek replied flatly.

"Figures," Kirk mumbled beneath his breath. "If you will excuse me, I'll go see Spock now." He turned to leave, and as he walked away mumbled something that sounded like, "This is not going to be easy. How the hell am I going to tell him?"

Sarek shook his head. He didn't envy the Admiral this task.

Spock knelt in his meditation chambers. One more night and he would be released from the care of the Healers, and for that he was grateful. As patient as they had been with him, he knew that he had been a trial to the Healers. It had not been an easy time - either for them or for himself. He looked up as the door slid open and James Kirk walked in.

Rising, he allowed a small smile to play upon his lips. "Jim, it is good to see you again."

Kirk smiled.

Spock was taken aback. The smile had not spread beyond Kirk's lips; a sure sign that something was amiss. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

Kirk shook his head quickly. "No...of course not," he replied, seating himself on a stool, and motioning Spock to do the same. "What could possibly be wrong?"

Puzzled, Spock was about to question him further when Kirk interrupted.

"Nothing's wrong," he insisted, changing the subject. "How do you feel?"

"Very well, thank you. I will be able to leave tomorrow."

"Yes, I know."

"It will be most pleasant to return to the Enterprise. I imagine, however, that she is in desperate need of repair, and that we will be in dry dock for some time." Kirk opened his mouth to speak, but Spock, not noticing, went on.

"Since we will be, no doubt, in space dock for several weeks, I believe now would be a good time to overhaul and update the ship's computer system.

The butterflies in Kirk's stomach grew worse.

"Then too, there are some improvements to the warp engines that Mr. Scott has been wanting to make for some time. They would increase the efficiency of the warp engines by 8.326 percent. This would be a good time to implement those improvements. Don't you agree, Jim?"

Kirk could not reply. Spock was so excited about returning to the ship, making plans....

"Jim? Are you all right?" The Admiral was staring at the wall to the left of the Vulcan. He loved that ship. Almost as much as Kirk did....

"Jim!"

Startled from his own thoughts, Kirk looked to Spock. "What?"

"I was asking if you agreed that now would be a good time to implement Mr. Scott's plans for improvements to the Enterprise's warp engines."

Closing his eyes, Kirk thought, 'Oh God, he wants to fix her up. He gave his life for that ship. Shit!'

"Jim? Are you sure you're all right?" Spock was concerned at his friend's behavior.

Kirk pulled his shoulders back, straightening, and swallowed hard. Lifting his head, he locked gazes with the Vulcan.

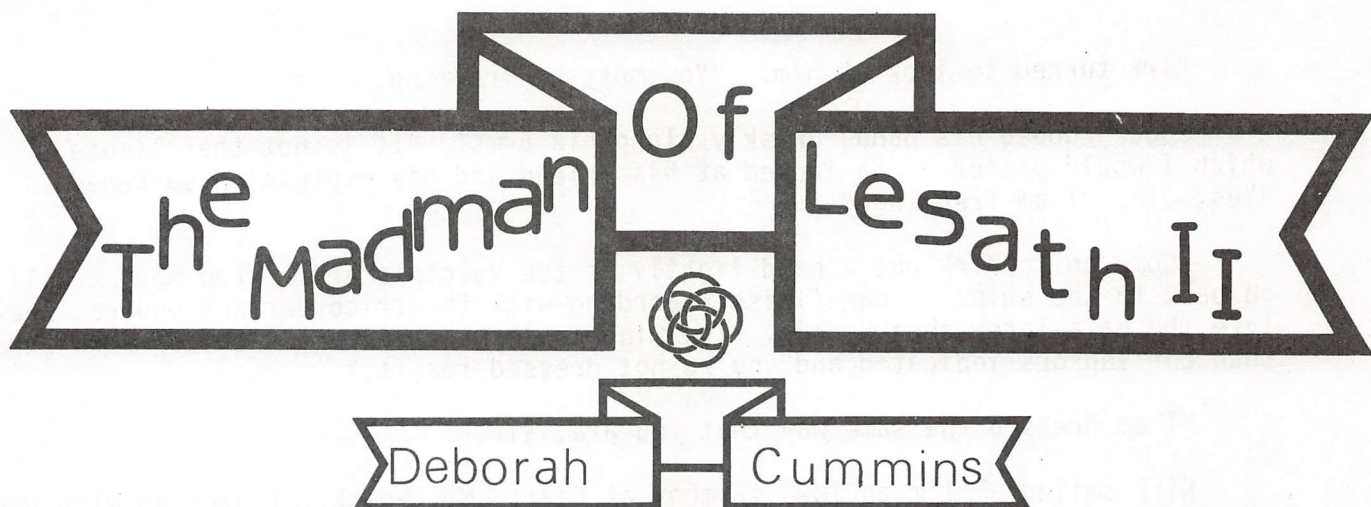
"Spock..."

And the one time he's not with me, I take her on one little rescue mission without him and what do I do? Do I bring the ship back so he can come home?

"Yes, Jim?"

There was no easy way. It just had to be said, but..."About the Enterprise. There's something I've been meaning to tell you...."





The scintillating beams of the transporter lit up the windswept meadow. The small animals grazing nearby lifted their heads in interest before scampering away as the lights coalesced into the six humanoid forms.

One of the forms took a step forward and shielded his eyes with his arm. "A bit windy, Mr. Spock." He slapped his arms against his sides. "And cold."

The Vulcan moved with him, his eyes on the tricorder. "I register 22 degrees Celsius, according to our estimates, there is very little variation in that temperature." He looked up, shielding his eyes in a gesture mimicking the Captain's as he surveyed the stark landscape. The sun, white and dim at this distance, shone weakly overhead, its vertical light casting harsh shadows across the land.

Kirk signalled the others in the landing party. "Carstairs, Isaac, you go in that direction," He pointed towards the north. "Scout around. Take some soil samples. Magee and Chin, go toward the southwest, check out what's over that rise." He gestured to a rocky outcrop at the far side of the meadow. "Mr. Spock and I will proceed to the east and take readings with the tricorder."

The others nodded and began to move off.

"Scanners predicted the cold, but I didn't expect the wind, Mr. Spock." He found himself shouting as a gust carried his words away.

The Vulcan nodded. "I register 35 miles per hour." He squinted as the cold stung his eyes. "It is to be expected, Captain. There are no mountains or other natural obstacles for nearly 500 miles. The high pressure systems accompanying the cold temperatures would have a tendency to create gusty wind conditions such as we are experiencing."

Kirk moved off ahead of Spock, kicking his feet along the top of the prairie grass as he walked. "This planet would not appear to be a prime candidate for Canopus IV's colonizers."

Spock moved up once again to join him. "The colony is composed of members from various planets, Captain. Some of them come from worlds which are not dissimilar to this one. They may indeed find this world suitable for an offshoot colony."

Kirk turned to look at him. "You must be freezing."

Spock rubbed his hands briskly along his arms. "It is not the climate which I would prefer." He looked at his friend and his expression softened. "Yes, Jim. I am freezing."

"Come on." Kirk put a hand lightly on the Vulcan's arm. "You may as well go back to the ship. I can finish recording with the tricorder and you can analyze the data later aboard ship. The wind chill makes it a lot colder down here than our sensors indicated and you're not dressed for it."

"I am dressed the same way that you are, Sir."

Kirk smiled. "I'm an Iowa farmboy at heart, Mr. Spock. I grew up with the cold weather. And believe me, there isn't any place in the galaxy as cold as Iowa in the winter."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I hardly find that statement accurate."

Kirk laughed aloud at the comment. "Mr. Spock, you're a literalist."

Spock saw no reason to reply to such an obvious statement and he turned his eyes back to the tricorder as he hurried to make a few more readings before Kirk forced him back to the warmth of the Enterprise.

"Captain!" Lieutenant Chin, standing about 40 yards from them, pointed to the tumbled pile of rocks lying on the edge of the meadow. All eyes turned to follow his gesture as a lone figure walked slowly from behind the rocks and stood surveying them. Then, with slow, deliberate steps, the alien began walking in their direction.

"Security, get back here." Kirk recalled his men until they all stood together. His eyes never left the alien. "Spock, what is it?"

The Vulcan made hurried readings with the tricorder. "A humanoid, Captain, but I am getting very strange readings. Totally alien, despite the similarity in appearance to humans."

"Why didn't your tricorder pick it up earlier?"

"The readings are sporadic, Captain. They don't register as a discernable life form. The contours of the creature appear to be wavering, as if it had no distinctive boundary."

"But it is an individual being, you can see that."

Spock looked up from his tricorder to survey the creature. "Indeed, it would appear so. However, the tricorder reports something different. Most peculiar."

Kirk pulled out his communicator and signalled the ship.

"Scott here."

"Mr. Scott, we've found a humanoid down here. It's standing approximately 22 meters in front of me. What do your sensors read?"

After a moment, the Scotsman answered, his voice confused. "Sir, we register the landing party and we're getting a reading from something else down there, a living body, but it's strange, the signal fluctuates, like the life reading keeps dissipating, then pulling itself back together again."

Kirk looked over at his science officer, who was scrutinizing the alien, his eyes wide with curiosity. "Well, Spock?"

"Unknown, Captain. Shall we approach him?"

"Him?"

"The readings that I am getting indicate a male, although the pattern is bizarre, to say the least."

Before Kirk could answer, the humanoid, who had stopped moving, raised his arms and began to approach them again.

"Scotty, keep a fix on us. We're going to try and make contact with the alien. I'll keep the signal open."

"Aye, sir."

Slowly, the landing party advanced as one unit toward the humanoid, who continued to walk toward them. The creature was short and thin, the skin white and crusty in appearance. The human-looking face had a grisly look to it, the skin was stretched tightly over the facial bones, giving it the appearance of a death's head. The head itself was large, incongruously large perched on the stalk of the thin neck. The long black robes that he wore whipped around the bony legs, making a snapping noise as they cracked against one another behind him.

Cautiously, they approached one another. Then, when they were 20 feet apart, the creature stopped. A sickening smile spread across his face and he screamed out a series of unintelligible sounds, the high-pitched wail accompanied by an eerie sound resembling laughter. Then, clutching at his head, he fell to the ground in a heap and was still.

The landing party ran toward the body and gathered around him. Kirk reached a tentative hand out, cringing involuntarily at the feel of the dry, cold skin. The alien appeared to be dead.

"Spock, what do you make of this?" When he received no answer, he turned and looked back in the direction from which they had come.

Spock stood, rooted to the same spot he had stood on before the alien fell. His eyes were locked on something directly before him.

"Spock?" Kirk rose to his feet. For a second, his legs felt paralyzed, unable to move. Suddenly, the Vulcan grabbed his head and fell backwards. An unearthly scream was torn from his throat. His back arched and his boots made furrows in the rocky ground where he dug his heels into it. Kirk reached him in

seconds, pulling the hands from his face when he saw the blood Spock was drawing as he tore at his skin.

"Richardson, Isaacs, help me!"

The two burly security guards knelt on both sides of him and they twisted the arms away and pinned them to the ground. The body beneath them struggled violently for a moment. Then Spock took a shuddering breath and collapsed into unconsciousness.

The three men knelt over him, panting from the exertion of the struggle. Kirk, regaining his breath first, reached to feel for the pulse, then pulled out his communicator. "Scotty, prepare to beam up two. Medical emergency." He turned to the security detail.

"Lieutenant Richardson, you and your men will stay down here and form a guard around the alien. No one, absolutely no one, is to approach the body until we get a team down here to investigate. I don't want anything disturbed until we can get some observations on this thing." He handed the security men his tricorder. "Scan the area. There may be more of those creatures around. If you see anything out of the ordinary, anything at all, I want to know about it at once."

Kirk looked around. His eyes took in the bleak meadow at a glance. "Be careful. Whatever happened to Spock could happen again to one of you. Stay together. I don't want any unauthorized investigations."

"Yes sir." Richardson's eyes left his and he looked down at Spock.

"I'll keep you informed, Lieutenant." Kirk lifted his communicator. "Energize."

The soft lights of the diagnostic panel blinked on and off, their objective readings blindly oblivious to the ominous reports they were giving on the patient below.

"Jim, have a look at this." McCoy motioned him away from the bed where he had been standing for the past twenty minutes, watching the monitors. Kirk knew that he was no doctor, but even he could recognize how wrong these readings were.

He turned and followed McCoy into the adjoining room. A nurse quickly took up a position by Spock's bed.

McCoy leaned over the monitor. He looked up at Kirk as the Captain moved toward him and the furrows in his face seemed carved to the bone. "Jim, I ran a standard Steinman on Spock three months ago and another one just now. Look."

He flipped the switch and the two brain scans appeared side by side on the monitor. The two men studied the pictures for a moment in silence. Then McCoy looked up into Kirk's stricken face. "You see the difference?"

Kirk recognized the scan taken three months ago. He had seen it before and had been entranced by the smooth, mathematical peaks and valleys that characterized

Spock's brain patterns. Regular, even, the peaks touching the high points, even running off the charts on some traits, and trailing off far above the norm on the lower end of the scale.

Then he looked to the second chart. The basic pattern was the same, but there was a jarring dissimilarity in the dispersal of the lines. The smooth, evenly spaced record was replaced with a chart showing lines fluctuating wildly, clustering together and then separated by large gaps.

McCoy watched, his face pale as he studied the chart. "According to your report, his collapse coincided almost to the second with the death of the alien?"

Kirk nodded, his eyes never leaving the monitor.

"Then, there must be a connection."

"What could cause that, Doctor? Could it be an infection, something he could have picked up on the surface? I still have people down there."

McCoy shook his head. "I've run tests for infectious parasites and haven't found a thing. Of course, if it's something totally alien, my equipment wouldn't pick it up right away. If it is contagious, the men are better off on the planet until we can isolate it." McCoy turned away from the monitor and began to pace across the room, his brow furrowed in concentration. After a moment, he turned back to Kirk, who was still staring at the monitor. "Captain, I'd like to take a close look at that body. Can we bring it on board for an autopsy?"

Kirk turned off the monitor. "You're convinced there is no danger of contamination?"

"I can't be positive, but all my tests so far are negative. The medical checks that I ran on you didn't turn anything up, either. I've got two doctors on the planet and their reports agree with mine. Whatever happened down there seemed to have only affected Spock." He lowered his voice. "Jim, I can study it with far greater effect on board than I could running tests on the surface. It will be put in sterile isolation. It's the best we can do in dealing with an unknown like this, but, in my opinion, the potential risks justify it."

Kirk's eyes were distant. Then a spasm seemed to pass through him. "You didn't hear him scream, Bones. Dear God, I can still hear it, an unearthly, terrified scream. I never thought that I'd ever hear Spock make a sound like that."

His eyes came back to McCoy. "What happened to him, Bones? Is he going to be all right?"

McCoy dropped his eyes. "I can't answer that now, Captain. I'm sorry. Perhaps we'll know more when he regains consciousness."

Kirk found his eyes travelling to the bed where Spock lay, his face a pasty white, his breathing rapid and irregular.

"Captain, the alien?"

"All right, Doctor. I'll have the body sealed and beamed up within the hour. You take care of decontamination here and I'll notify you when we're ready."

Kirk walked by the bed on his way out, determined not to stop, but his steps slowed in spite of himself and he turned to face the bed.

The monitors suddenly took a leap upward and Spock's head began to move back and forth on the pillow.

"Bones! He's coming around." Kirk was at his side in seconds, his hands along the sides of Spock's face. He watched expectantly as the Vulcan's eyes fluttered open. "Spock, how do... " The words froze in his throat and he withdrew his hands and took an involuntary step backwards. Behind him, he heard McCoy gasp.

The soft brown eyes he expected to see were gone now. The pupils seemed black, an icy, empty black. The expression in the face was indescribable and it cut through his chest like a knife. The face that looked back at him was a stranger.

After a second, Kirk found his voice. "Who are you."

The creature raised himself unsteadily on his elbows, blinking his eyes as he adjusted to the light. Then, he held his hands out before him and flexed his finger, staring at them for a moment. "I have done it." And he laughed, a wild, irrational laugh. "I am free. I have done it!"

The creature looked up at him. "I am the madman. Don't you know? I am the madman." He looked around the room. "Where is this?" He furrowed his brow and seemed to draw within himself for a moment in concentration. "The Enter... " The brows knotted again. "Yes, the Enterprise. A starship. They tried to bury me alive and I find myself on a starship."

Kicking the blankets aside, he rose to his feet and stood, his legs braced widely apart. "Yes, this will do well. This body is much stronger."

Kirk flipped on the intercom. "Security to Sickbay on the double." The Vulcan looked at him quizzically as Kirk reached over and grabbed his arm. "What do you want? Where is Spock?"

The creature looked down at the hand clutching his arm. His expression became dreamy. "It has been so long since I have felt the touch of another. I have been alone for so long."

Kirk tightened his grip on the arm. "I said, where is Spock? Is he dead? Did you kill him?"

The black eyes looked back into his own and the soft expression hardened. "I have taken his place." He pulled out of Kirk's grasp and glared at him, the gentleness which had filled the face a moment ago now replaced by a deep, smoldering anger. Then his posture seemed to relax and he laughed again as he began to walk around the room. "He is here," he pointed to the center of his chest, "within me. He will keep me company, help me to adjust to my new life."

His words were interrupted by the abrupt arrival of the security team. Three men quietly entered the room and stood near the door, their hands resting on their phasers, their eyes on Kirk. He motioned them back. "What new life?"

"Here." The creature continued to eye the security detail. "This is my new home." He looked away and fixed his gaze on Kirk again. "My mental powers are stronger than his. I surprised him when I entered his body and his memories, some of them, were exposed to me for an instant. I know you." He took a step closer to Kirk as the security team fingered their phasers. "You are the one he called Jim. Already I can sense that you are the different one." His eyes narrowed as he studied the face before him. "And a human no less. Now that is funny."

He moved away from Kirk and arched his back, his hands on his hips. "Yes, this body will serve me nicely."

He took a step towards the Sickbay door and Kirk immediately moved to block his way. "That body already belongs to someone else." The creature looked at him for a moment, then raised his hand to grip the Captain's arm. The security guard lifted their phasers from their belts.

McCoy moved in to stand between them. "I find your transference a fascinating experience." He put a hand on the creature's arm. "Your consciousness *did* come from the alien that died on the planet's surface. I would like to learn more about it. You must be a highly intelligent and inventive being to have successfully accomplished it."

The dark visage brightened noticeably. "Yes. I studied for years. Those fools thought that they could lock me away on that accursed planet forever, but I showed them. Mad, they called me, Mad."

McCoy led him to the examining table, but the creature was so caught up in recounting his tale that he did not seem to notice. "My weak little friends couldn't deal with me. Oh, they tried. Therapies and treatments for years, but my mind grew stronger and they began to fear me."

McCoy seated him on the table. "You are a doctor. You understand."

"Yes," McCoy soothed. "I understand."

"They thought I would kill them all." He leaned forward and fixed McCoy with a wide glare. "And they were right, you know. My keepers thought that they had rid themselves of me. They gave me food and supplies to last forever. They gave me my life, to wallow in my madness and thought of themselves as compassionate for letting me live. But I did live and vowed I would escape that prison and avenge myself on them." They thought that if they imprisoned my body on the planet, I would be forced to remain forever. They didn't count on my new abilities."

He stopped talking for a moment and looked at Kirk again. "I saw the sun travel across my skies 48 times before you rescued me. Do you know how long a day is on my world?"

Kirk knew. One hundred forty two earth days,

"I had time, time to develop my skills, my abilities to exist outside of my body." He looked away and his expression became dreamy again as he lost himself in his twisted memories. "I practiced on the animals at first. I would sit eating the grass and watch that infernal body of mine standing staring off into

nothingness and I grew to hate it like I never hated anything before. That body was what imprisoned me there. It could not exist off the planet, but my mind could." His expression seemed to refocus and he looked up at McCoy. "I needed another body to get me off that prison they left me on.

Once, a ship landed on the planet. There were two humanoids inside, but I wasn't ready. My powers weren't strong enough and both of the unfortunate creatures died. I was lucky to escape the dying bodies in time or I would have died with them. I vowed that I would never make that mistake again. So when you came I hid myself." He paused for a moment as his mind relived the experience. "I could sense his telepathic abilities all the way across the meadow. They will add to my own and make me strong."

He looked at the grim faces watching him, all but McCoy's, whose face was gentle and compassionate. "Accept it." He laughed. "Perhaps we can be friends. I have his memories, some of them at least. He shields much of his mind from me, but his strength cannot last and I have time." He turned to the Doctor and reached a hand up to grab his arm. "You will like me. I'll make you like me. You liked *him* and I have the same face, the same body." He pulled on the doctor's arm, pleading for understanding. "I begged them not to leave me there alone."

Then his eyes darkened. The sudden mood changes shocked Kirk but McCoy seemed to have expected it. "I'll show them." The words hissed from a mouth that barely moved. He twisted McCoy's restraining hand away. "I had a long time to develop my skills and my hatred." The eyes narrowed, the fury in them was almost palpable.

"No one will leave you alone now. You're safe with us." The Doctor's voice was soothing and gentle and the creature looked up at him with trusting eyes. McCoy continued to speak softly to him while his hand travelled unobtrusively to the shelf below the table. Searching for a moment, his fingers silently found the hypo and he lifted it into his hand.

Suddenly, his hand seemed frozen and he looked up to see the Vulcan face peering intently at him from only inches away. "Do you think I am a fool, Doctor? I may be mad, but I'm no fool. Even Spock gives you more credit than that."

McCoy's fingers were gripping the hypo but he could no longer feel it. he tried to move his hand, but it seemed frozen in place. The Vulcan eyes bored through him. "You don't even know what you're dealing with, Doctor. I can control your mind as easily as I can control my own."

Kirk moved to stand beside the table. "Doctor, what's wrong?"

"I can't move my hand." His entire arm felt numb now and he could sense the fear running through him as the paralysis spread.

Kirk grabbed the creature by the arm. "Stop it!" The security guard stepped forward to form a wedge behind him.

The Vulcan face turned to look at him. "Of course, Captain. I don't want to cause friction. Just leave me alone. I won't cause you any trouble. But," he turned to McCoy. "I can protect myself. Now, if you will excuse me, I would like to explore your ship."

He turned and walked from the room. Kirk nodded to the security guards who raised their phasers toward the departing form.

"No, Captain. Let him go." McCoy reached out to touch his arm. "Let him go. Don't provoke a confrontation until we can get a handle on what we're dealing with here."

Kirk studied the Doctor's face for a moment, then nodded his head. He turned back to the security guard. "Follow him. I want him under surveillance at all times. If he does anything disruptive or begins to act in an uncontrolled manner, I want him brought back here at once. Use your phasers to restrain him if necessary."

As the security guard left the Sickbay, Kirk turned to face McCoy again. "What caused your change of heart, Doctor. A moment ago, you were trying to knock him out yourself."

McCoy shook his fingers in the air as the sensation began to flow back into them. "Whatever the creature is that has taken over Spock's body, it registers as highly unstable emotionally. He called himself mad and I would tend to agree." He ran a scanner over his arm and looked up at Kirk as the results appeared before him. "Jim, according to this, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with my arm. My hand was paralyzed. I could feel the nerves deadening in a line up my arm. But, according to this, nothing biologically disruptive has occurred. We dare not antagonize him until we better understand what is going on. With such an unstable personality, any provocation that we're not prepared to deal with could be catastrophic.

"Jim," McCoy continued to rub his fingers together, unable to block the tingling sensations despite the scanners report that there had been no lack of blood circulation in his arm, "Do you think that he'll be able to tap into Spock's telepathic abilities. He mentioned that he sensed them. Do you think that's why he chose Spock?"

The thought had occurred to Kirk as well. If what they had just witnessed in the Sickbay was any indication, the creature had strong telepathic abilities of its own. If those powers were magnified into the combined forces of his own and Spock's together, the result could pose a grave threat to the safety of the ship.

"He hasn't done anything hostile as yet, Doctor. Security will keep an eye on him for now. I'm going down to the planet's surface. I'll check on the body and notify you when to beam down with your people. Then maybe we can get some answers.

The transporter beam materialized him at a spot two miles from where the alien's body still lay under guard. Several security personnel clustered around what appeared to be the remains of an extensive campsite. Piles of supplies and mounds of clothing lay carelessly strewn around its perimeter.

"Behronsohn!"

The head of the security team moved quickly to stand before him.

"Why wasn't any of this picked up on scanners."

"Sir." The security leader could feel the anger radiate off Kirk's body like a series of waves. "Everything here is composed of organic elements; the clothing, the food, even the containers used for storage are all comprised of reprocessed materials. Our sensors read it as another biological component on the planet's surface." He lowered his eyes. "I'm sorry, sir. There is no way our sensors would have read this," he gestured around him, "as artificial implements."

Kirk nodded. He knew that Behronsohn was correct. The sensors would not have raised any warning flags over this, any more than they would have singled out a dead bush or a fallen tree branch.

"Very well, Lieutenant. Are there any indications on the origin of the alien? If we could find out where he came from, we may be able to contact his people for help."

"We're searching, sir, but the settlement appears to have been here for a long time. The trail may be difficult to trace from this distance in time."

"Do your best, Lieutenant." He turned to walk around the campsite. The structure that had originally stood on the site had fallen down long ago. The wall struts jutted out toward the sky like the ribcage of a huge skeleton. Behronsohn continued to walk beside him. "Someone set him up well enough, but no one ever checked back, Sir."

Kirk kicked against a beam that lay on the ground, cursing silently those unnamed aliens who, in their ecological consciousness, had built this structure without metal or glass. Someday it would all return to the earth beneath it as if it had never been.

"Lieutenant, continue your investigation. I'm going over to examine that body."

When he made no move to take out his communicator, Behronsohn called after him. "You won't be using the transporter, Sir?"

"No," Kirk's voice carried in the wind. "I prefer to walk."

The walk across the wind-swept prairie seemed to take him forever. His eyes surveyed the barren landscape before him, a suitable place indeed for an exile, perpetual banishment on an inhospitable world unlikely to attract other visitors.

Until now.

His mind was racing, keeping time with his rapid steps as he pondered the situation confronting him. The alien, whoever he was and wherever he came from, was undoubtedly abandoned here when the madness he suffered from proved impossible for his own kind to deal with. Abandoned here with sufficient food and clothing to last him the remainder of his life, a life in total solitude. Kirk shivered

at the image of the mad creature wandering around this empty world, alone, howling and shrieking his misery out to no one and nothing.

And now that mad being was lodged in the body of his friend. Kirk's steps froze in mid-stride for an instant. Could that close proximity to madness drive Spock mad as well? Was he even aware of what was going on? Kirk found himself hoping that he was not.

He pulled out his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here."

"Mr. Scott, patch me through to Richardson in Security."

The security chief's voice came over the channel almost at once. "Richardson, what is he doing?"

"He's in the gym, sir. He's just watching the shift on exercises now. He seems rational enough. He's talking to some of the crew members. Surprised them a little when he initiated the conversation. He doesn't act like Mr. Spock, sir, but he's caused no trouble so far."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Keep him under surveillance. Let me know immediately if you see anything unusual. Kirk out."

He cut off the channel, then signalled the Sickbay. McCoy also answered at once. "Bones, I'm on my way to examine the alien's body. Get your people ready and meet me there in five minutes."

"Yes, sir. We'll be there."

"Very good, Doctor. Kirk out." He flipped the communicator lid down and continued to walk toward the tiny figures he could see in the distance.

The creature stood against the wall, watching as two security men tossed each other back and forth on the exercise mat. Then, he brushed his way forward to stand between them. "Let me try that."

Shocked into silence, the two men stared at him. Richardson silently signalled his men, standing unobtrusively along the wall and they moved a step forward.

The creature eyed the man standing closest to him. "You're afraid of me?"

The security man looked flustered. "No, Sir. Not exactly. It's just that you've never asked me like that before."

"Things are different now. Come on." He crouched down, his arms before him and began to circle the other man, his eyes never leaving his face. The security man, unsure of what to do, circled with him cautiously. He could see Richardson's pale face out of the corner of his eye.

Suddenly, without warning, the creature lunged at him, catching him around the waist, and flung him against the far wall. The sound he made when he fell cracked through the room and everyone there stood watching him in speechless amazement. Someone reached out and helped the dazed man to his feet. "Are you all right?"

Holding his side, the younger man rose unsteadily. "I think my ribs are broken." His face was white. All eyes turned to face the creature, who stood in the center of the room.

He laughed. "This is too easy." Then he walked across the room, their wide-eyed gazes following him.

Kirk arrived at the site where the body lay at the same instant that Dr. McCoy beamed down. He gave the Doctor a curt nod, then looked down at the creature.

It seemed tiny as it lay shrunken in death, the head tilting crazily across the twisted legs, the arms spread out away from it. The eyes were already sunken, the limbs stiff. McCoy barked orders to the personnel clustered around and they rapidly began setting up the sterile chamber into which the body would be placed. He moved to stand beside Kirk, his eyes taking in the ulcerous condition of the skin, the pasty complexion. The creature was thin, but it would take sophisticated tests to determine if that was the alien's natural condition. It had tiny ears and extremities. The body appeared to be totally hairless.

A rank odor of unwashed flesh blew into their faces with the wind and Kirk turned away. "Dear God," he murmured under his breath

Pulling medical gloves over his hands, McCoy rolled the creature onto its back. It was impossible to judge its age without tests, but it seemed old. The face, judging by human standards, was ravaged and deeply lined, the skin erupting in various rashes and boils. The hands were dirty. If the creature were not mad when he was first left here, McCoy thought, he was surely so by now. No intelligent creature could live like this, alone, and survive with his sanity intact.

Swiftly, the medical personnel expertly moved the corpse into the sterile field and then stood back, looking at McCoy expectantly.

"How long will it take for you to get some significant results." Kirk's gaze remained on the body, wrapped in fibrous material inside the metallic case.

"I should have something within two or three hours, Captain."

"All right." He tore his gaze away from the death's head that seemed to smile back at him. "Let's get back to the ship."

Once back on board the Enterprise, Kirk accompanied McCoy and his grisly cargo to the Sickbay isolation ward, then signalled the security team and located Spock in Recreation Room IV. He turned to McCoy. "I'm going to try to talk with him, Bones."

McCoy looked up from his work. "Be careful, Jim. We don't know yet how powerful he is. He should be considered highly dangerous."

Kirk nodded, his mind lost in thought as he turned and walked quickly from the Sickbay.

Kirk found him bent over the chessboard, the Vulcan expression on his face reminiscent of Spock as he had been. Kirk felt a surge of hope that somehow the alien had fled and Spock was back with him again.

Then the creature looked up at him and smiled. "Teach me how to play."

Kirk hesitated and the creature understood his moment of indecision. "He knows how to play. Of course he does. He would. And I'll bet he's good at it, isn't he, Kirk?" The creature closed his eyes and Kirk watched as his hands clenched before him on the table. "Tell me. Tell me." The furrows in his forehead deepened. The recreation room was in total silence. The security men stood behind Spock, their hands resting on the handles of their phasers.

"All right, you pig." The creature hissed the words under his breath. "You'll pay for that insolence."

Kirk watched as his expression set. He shifted his weight uncertainly, watching the familiar, yet unfamiliar face as it darkened.

Suddenly, the realization of what was happening hit him and he grabbed Spock's arms, pulling him to his feet. "Stop it!" He shook him fiercely. "Stop it!"

The creature looked up at him. He smiled, the expression like a physical blow that almost drove Kirk back. "Or what, Kirk. What will you do? Kill me? Then you kill him too." He shook off Kirk's hands and moved a step backwards. "He will continue to suffer for his impudence, just as he suffers now. He screams now in his agony, Kirk. Would you like to hear him scream?" He grabbed Kirk's hand and pulled it to his temple.

"No!" Kirk twisted away from him at the same instant that the security guards pulled out their phasers and aimed them at Spock's back.

"I could kill you all, Kirk, if I wanted to." He pushed the Captain back against the table and the chessboard fell to the floor, shattering into a dozen pieces.

Kirk sought out the eyes of the security guards, but the men did not fire. They stared at the weapons in their hands. Then, with a cry of pain, they dropped the phasers to the floor, holding their hands together in agony.

"What is it? What happened?" Kirk took a step toward the weapons lying on the floor. The creature stood before him, blocking his way. "They cannot help you, Kirk." The dark eyes were narrow. He seemed almost like a wild beast.

Seeing him turn toward the Captain, one of the guards dove for the weapon that had fallen at his feet. Then, with a gasp he dropped it again and pulled his hand away.

Pushing his shoulder into Spock's ribs, Kirk shoved him back and scooped up the phaser. He aimed it at the center of Spock's chest.

"It will burn your hand, Kirk." The creature was smiling. "You cannot control your mind. It burns you. *Feel* it."

No! The phaser is not burning me. Kirk resisted the urge to look at the palm that was already blistering from the contact with the white hot metal.

"It burns you. Look!"

"No!" He fired the weapon and the beam sent the creature to his knees. He looked up at Kirk with an expression of shocked surprise. Then another bolt sent him to the floor and he lay still.

Kirk stood in the center of the room, his chest heaving, as he watched the unconscious form of the creature who had once been his friend. Then he looked down at his hands. The skin was smooth, the sensation of burning quickly fading away along with the creature's consciousness.

The security men rose to join him. They held their hands out before them in astonishment. The skin which they had seen blister and blacken before their eyes was smooth and unmarked.

Kirk gestured to the figure lying before them. "Take him to the Sickbay. Have McCoy put him in double restraints and keep him heavily sedated."

Kirk watched as they carried the limp form from the room. He had never felt so helpless in his life.

Captain James Kirk stood on the bridge of the Enterprise, trying to focus on what it was that had brought them to this infernal world. The settlement of the Canopus colonizers seemed utterly unimportant to him now.

The buzzer at his side called to him. "Kirk here."

"McCoy, Captain." He hesitated. "We've run every test we can think of on the body, Captain and we've come up with nothing. The creature was an omnivore, warm blooded, chromosome pattern similar to those of a thousand other species." Again, hesitation. "I'm sorry, Captain. There is no way to determine the creature's identity or point of origin."

Kirk lowered his eyes. It was a long shot from the beginning and the Doctor's report did not really surprise him. "Thank you, Doctor. How is he?"

"He's out cold, Jim. I've given him enough sedation to keep him out for a week."

"All right, Doctor. I'll be down later to check on him. Kirk out."

He flipped off the intercom and stood at his command chair, his fingers drumming along the arm. So, he thought morosely, they had nothing, no leads on

where the alien may have come from or what he had done which had resulted in his incarceration on the planet below.

"Damn." He muttered the word under his breath, but everyone on the bridge heard it. No one, however, looked up.

It was only minutes later when the buzzer again called to him. It was McCoy again, but this time the calm voice was replaced by an agitated one.

"Captain, you'd better get down here."

"What is it, Doctor. What happened?"

"It's Spock, Jim. He's gone."

"What in the hell happened." Kirk burst into the Sickbay without warning. "I told you to keep him sedated, Doctor."

"He was sedated, Captain. I gave him enough to sedate half the crew!"

"Then what happened?"

"How in the hell do I know!" McCoy had raised his voice and, seeing Kirk's dark expression, he dropped his head and looked away.

A nurse ran into the room behind him, holding out a hypo. "Doctor, look at this."

McCoy took it from her, his expression one of total confusion. "I gave him this shot. I know I did." He turned to the nurse who had handed it to him. "You saw me give it to him."

She nodded her head, looking at the Captain. "That's correct, Sir. I saw him give Mr. Spock that injection over an hour ago."

Kirk reached out and took the syringe from McCoy's hand. It was full. "Who knows. Maybe it was another hypo you gave him. Maybe he just made you think it was this hypo. Maybe you shot him up with Vitamin B instead. Hell, maybe he was never even here in the first place."

He looked up at McCoy. "He's out of control, Bones. We can't confine him. How dangerous is he? Could he kill someone?"

McCoy looked away for a moment. "Doctor. Is he homicidal?"

"Yes."

Kirk nodded his head. He knew the answer but had hoped that he was wrong. His mind raced through all of their alternatives. It was apparent to all that they were rapidly being limited to only one.

Security details stood within sight of one another throughout the ship, but the creature continued to elude them.

Kirk found himself prowling the corridors, checking and double checking everything, searching out areas of the ship where Spock had frequented in the hopes of finding him there. He tried to shake his growing sense of dread as he moved rapidly through the hallways. He had hoped that Spock would have been able to break through the creature's control to help him, but as the hours passed, that hope faded away. Spock was probably as helpless as he was. Gritting his teeth in frustration, Kirk approached the nearest security guard and questioned the ship's status for the tenth time in as many minutes.

McCoy caught up with him on the engineering deck. "Captain?" Kirk stopped walking, but he continued to shift his weight back and forth on his feet. The Doctor reached out to put a hand on his arm. "Jim, you look exhausted. We're doing everything we can to find him. Why don't you try to get some rest."

Kirk pulled his arm away. "Is that your best suggestion, Doctor?" He walked a few steps away from McCoy, then turned back. "I've got a dozen science labs, the finest equipment in Starfleet on board this vessel." He looked at McCoy, his expression furious. "There are 53 of my people on the planet below, scouring nearly two tons of debris that... the creature left behind and they haven't been able to come up with anything but speculation." He pounded one fist into the open palm of the other hand. "I need answers, Doctor, not theories."

"Captain, we're doing our best."

Kirk did not seem to hear him. "And what do we do when we *do* find him, Doctor? We can't confine him, we can't be sure that he's really in custody. He's gotten away from us before, he'll do it again." Kirk turned away. "Damn it, Doctor. He could be standing right in front of me and influencing my mind so that I don't see him!"

He turned an anguished face back to McCoy. "I don't want to hurt him, Bones. I don't want to hurt either of them. This creature that we're dealing with is sick. He's not really responsible for his actions. What do I do if I can't hold him, if he starts to hurt people?"

McCoy looked at him, unable to offer consolation. Kirk's point was clear. If it came down to a choice between Spock and the safety of the ship, he knew what Kirk's decision would be.

"I don't want to have to face that possibility, Doctor." Kirk seemed to have read his thoughts. "Find me another answer." There was no room for compromise in his tone.

McCoy looked away. "We'll do everything possible, Sir."

Kirk nodded, then turned and walked down the hall. "I'll be in my quarters."

The quarters were dark as he stepped inside and he reached over to flip on the light. Then, turning around, he gasped aloud as his eyes fell on the figure sitting in the chair before his desk.

"Spock?"

The familiar Vulcan form stood up and turned to face him. He seemed distraught and Kirk saw with disbelief that his cheeks were stained with tears. He reached his hands out. "He fights me all the time. I can't live like this, with him constantly warring within me. You must make him stop. He will listen to you. Please make him stop fighting me."

Kirk moved to put the table between them. "He wants to get back what is rightfully his. We can help you, but you must release him first. You must leave his body. We can provide a suitable environment for you to..."

"No!" He wrung his hands in a state of near frenzy. "You will send me back. I will never go back. I will die first! I will die and take you all with me!"

The creature looked at him. "That is what *they* told me, that I would not die. They comforted me with the idea that I would have my life even though I had taken the lives of the others, but the others, they deserved to die." He turned and began to pace the room. "They should have killed me. It would have been better to be dead than to live there for so long alone. But I am alone no longer and I will never go back!" His eyes were wide and the disjointed flow of his thoughts were difficult for Kirk to follow.

"What others?" Kirk probed the creature for information.

The Vulcan eyes narrowed as they scrutinized him. "You try to find out about me. But I won't tell you. If you knew you would send me away."

"No. We only want to help you. We can..."

"No!" He moved around the desk and stood before Kirk. "I will never go back. I'll kill you first. I've killed before, I'll do it again." He laughed. "That's why they sent me to Lesath, you know. Murder, mutilation. The blood running through my fingers." He held his hand up, the fingers splayed out. "I can still feel it." He looked away from the hand held out before him and fixed his gaze on Kirk. "I think that I would like to feel it again."

His expression was dark again, the pleading of a moment ago vanished into the depths of his madness as if it had never been.

Kirk took a step backwards. "Spock wouldn't kill me."

The creature smiled at him. "You give too much attention to external appearances, Captain Kirk. It is a fault which will prove to be your undoing." The creature moved towards him again.

"We can help you. But you have to trust us."

"Trust you?" He reached a long arm out and grabbed Kirk by the collar, pulling their bodies together until they were touching shoulder to shoulder. Then he raised his arm and hit Kirk across the back, a crushing blow that came with

such speed that Kirk was unable to deflect it. The force sent him crashing into the far wall and he sank to his knees. The creature was on him in an instant, dragging him away from the wall and pinning his arms to the floor. Kirk struggled under him, but the Vulcan grip had a terrifying strength to it and he found himself unable to move.

The creature straddled his waist. He looked like the devil himself, the image no longer an amusing one, as he leaned over Kirk, his own hands along the sides of Kirk's face where he held his arms down.

"I *will* kill you, Kirk." With one swift gesture, he pulled Kirk's arms down to his sides and expertly pinned them beneath his knees. He laughed at Kirk's ineffectual attempts to pull away. "He never used his full strength on you, Kirk. He was a fool, a weakling. But I am no fool. I will use what I have."

His hands free now, he grabbed Kirk by the hair and twisted his head to one side. His other hand traced a pattern along the edge of the neck until it stopped at the shoulder.

"He's told you of this." The fingers pressed into the neck. "tal shaya. I know of that too. It is said to be painless." He twisted Kirk's head farther to one side. "Tell me, is that true?"

The fingers pressed more tightly into his neck and he could feel the pressure against his vertebrae. He struggled again, but Spock's strength totally overwhelmed him. Kirk gasped as the fingers bore into his neck.

Suddenly the grip loosened and the creature's expression changed. "What is this? He pleads, Kirk. He pleads for you." He laughed, a deep baritone laugh filled with cruelty. "'Please' he begs me, Kirk, 'do not kill him.' He cries, Kirk. He cries for you."

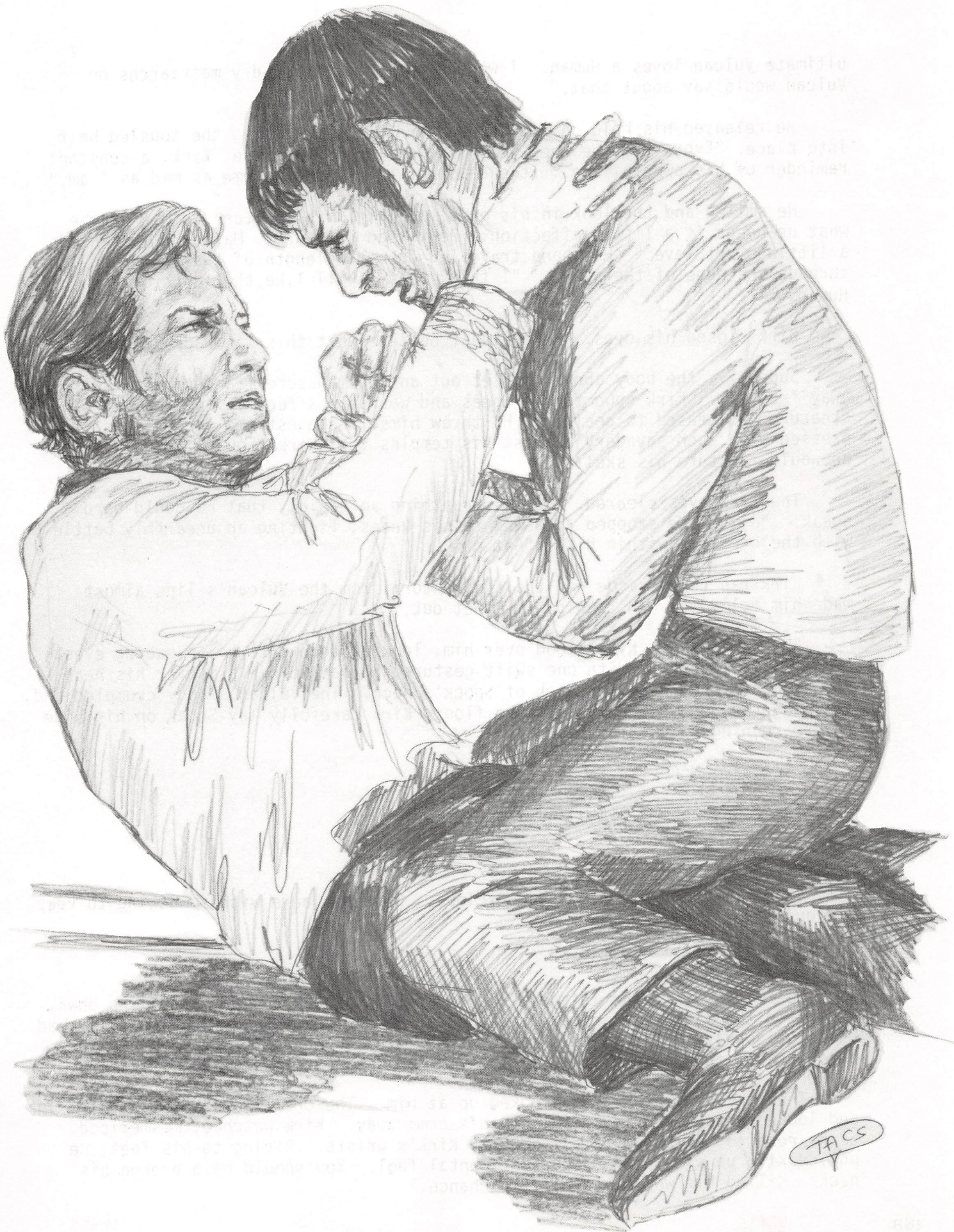
The hands came away from his face. "All right, Vulcan, plead for him. What will you give me?"

The creature waited expectantly for a moment. Then, the visage darkened and the hands went up to grab Kirk's head and twisted it savagely to one side. The suddenness of the movement stunned him and he groaned as the pain shot through his neck.

"That's it, Kirk." The hands continued to hold him in an unyielding grip. "Cry out. He can't bear to hear you cry." His eyes seemed to focus inward. "Tell me or I'll break it."

Kirk could see that he was trying to break through the walls of Spock's resistance. "No, Spock. Don't..." The words were cut off as the creature towering over him tightened his grip, pulling his head in what he would have believed to be an impossible angle. He smothered a groan, knowing that Spock would feel his pain whether he cried out or not.

The creature began to laugh as he loosened his grip. He had gotten what he wanted. "Now that is funny, Kirk. All of his life he has built himself up to be a totally logical and dispassionate creature, and, just when he believes that he has reached his goal, he meets you and the entire logical facade comes crashing down. What glorious irony. He loves you, Kirk. Fancy that. The



ultimate Vulcan loves a Human. I wonder what those dust-dry matriarchs on Vulcan would say about that."

He released his hold on Kirk's head and began smoothing the tousled hair into place. "Every time he sees you, it's a slap in the face, Kirk, a constant reminder of his own failure. It's a wonder he doesn't become as mad as I am."

He smiled and the look in his eyes made Kirk's blood turn cold. "Maybe what he needs is a little affection. Poor, sad creature. Maybe he just needs a little overt love." His hand travelled down the length of the tunic and laced through the edge of the pants. "I think that I will like the taste of you Humans."

Kirk closed his eyes. He couldn't believe that this was happening.

Suddenly, the body above him let out an inhuman scream and threw itself away from him. Kirk spun to his knees and was on his feet in seconds, but the creature had ceased to see him. He threw himself against the corner, his hands pressed with such savagery against his temples that Kirk thought for an instant he would fracture his skull.

Then the eyes cleared. He was breathing so rapidly that he could hardly speak. "Jim." He stopped and sank to his knees, fighting an unearthly battle with the creature within him. "Get out."

Kirk ran to his side and the shriek torn from the Vulcan's lips almost made him fall. "I can't hold him. Get out."

For an instant, Kirk stood over him, looking down into his pleading eyes. "Forgive me, Spock." With one swift gesture, he raised his arm over his head and brought it down on the back of Spock's neck. The Vulcan's body crumpled and, catching the head before it hit the floor, Kirk carefully lay Spock on his side before running to the intercom.

"Sickbay, McCoy!"

There was no immediate answer. "McCoy!"

"McCoy here."

"Spock is in my quarters unconscious. Get down here with something to keep him out."

"On my way."

He switched off the intercom and returned to Spock's side. Kneeling down, he lifted the limp form and pulled it onto his lap. Spock lay relaxed, his head hanging loosely against Kirk's lap. Kirk gently touched his face, unable to believe that the peaceful face before him could harbor such a creature.

Then the eyes opened and looked up at him. The creature's hands reached up and locked onto his wrists, pulling his arms away. Kirk watched, mesmerized, as he rose to his knees, still holding Kirk's wrists. Rising to his feet, he pulled Kirk up with him. "You sentimental fool. You should have broken his neck. Killed him while you had the chance."

The sound of footsteps echoed from outside. The door opened and McCoy ran in, a hypo extended in one hand. He stopped abruptly when he saw the creature conscious and on his feet. He looked at Kirk expectantly.

The creature turned to look at him. "I'll have his telepathic powers soon, Doctor. Those abilities, coupled with my own, will make me a formidable adversary, indeed."

He turned back to Kirk. "He fights me, but he grows tired. My mind surrounds his totally and he has to battle me on all sides at once. Soon, he will weaken and I will break through and then everything in his mind will be mine." He lowered his voice. "I will feed on him like a cannibal, Kirk. And I will spit out what's left over in your face." His eyes glared into Kirk's.

Out of the corner of his eye, Kirk could see McCoy begin to inch forward and he stepped away from him. The creature moved with him and he turned his back to the Doctor. The hypo was inches away from his back and McCoy was raising it up when his arm froze. A terrified expression ran across his face as the hypo moved back and repositioned itself so that it now pointed at the Doctor himself.

The creature did not break eye contact with Kirk. "I see him, you know. I know what he is going to do. Why do you continue to test me?"

Kirk looked behind him and saw the hypo press up against the Doctor's arm and empty its contents into him. Within seconds, McCoy crumpled and fell heavily to the floor.

"His compassion has saved his life. If he had intended to kill me, he'd be dead now."

He laughed. "My people were right to banish me, were they not?"

Then, pushing Kirk away from him, he stepped over the inert body on the floor and left the room. Kirk attempted to follow him, but his feet seemed rooted to the ground and he had to watch helplessly as the creature walked calmly down the hall, passing the security detail who were milling around the corridor in a state of total confusion. He turned to look at Kirk, gesturing towards the guards. "They don't even know where they are, Kirk." Then he laughed and was gone.

McCoy regained consciousness in the Sickbay and his first sight was the form of James Kirk, pacing rapidly back and forth before him. His hands were clasped tightly behind his back, his expression grim.

He turned to see the Doctor's eyes on him. "He attacked two of my crew members, Doctor. No apparent reason, he just walked past them in the corridor, then turned and attacked them. Carlson has a broken arm and three broken ribs, Isaacs, internal bleeding and a ruptured spleen. They'll both be all right, no thanks to him." The pacing began again. "I've got ships sensors tracking him, but even if he decides to do anything, there's nothing we can do to stop him. He's totally out of control."

He turned and faced McCoy. "Before Lieutenant Isaacs lost consciousness, he said that he heard Spock talking about earth, Doctor. He was talking about taking the ship to earth."

"He doesn't have the power to do that?"

Kirk stood before him, his legs were spread wide apart, his hands behind his back. McCoy wondered if he were aware of the posture. "Maybe not today, but he will soon. We can't take the chance. We may have to kill him."

"Jim. You can't be serious. We're talking about Spock."

"We're talking about an alien that now poses a significant threat to this vessel. He has attacked two crewmember already and with every passing hour, he becomes more unstable and his mind becomes more powerful. Can you guarantee that you will be able to restrain him and keep him confined?"

McCoy shook his head. "No."

Pain reflected in Kirk's eyes for a moment. Then it was savagely pushed away. "He's not totally in control of his telepathic abilities yet. Unless we can find some way to stop him very soon, we could lose any chance we'd have."

"We'll go over what we know about him. Maybe we missed something that can give us a clue to who he is. It's going to take time."

"We don't have much time, Bones. I've tried to think of what he said in my quarters, but there doesn't seem to be anything much there that will help us... nothing, just a madman's ramblings..." His voice broke and he turned his back to the Doctor and walked quickly to the far wall. "We don't even know if Spock's consciousness is alive anymore. He could kill someone the next time." He turned back to look at McCoy. His face was white.

The buzz of the intercom interrupted their argument. Kirk hit the button with a closed fist. "Kirk here."

"Security, Captain. We've found Mr. Spock, Sir. He has just left the rec room and is heading towards the engineering section."

Kirk stared at the intercom for a moment. "Very well, Keep me in..."

The soft sound of the door opening broke into his words and he looked up to see the creature standing in the hallway. He smiled when he saw Kirk's startled expression. "The engineering crew will be calling up shortly, Captain. They will report that I am in their sector, snooping around their classified equipment. They would all swear on their Starfleet honor that they are looking at me at this very instant." He walked casually into the Sickbay, jarring Kirk with his elbow as he passed. "It's a lot of fund playing games with your crew, but it's getting too easy. I would like to go somewhere else." He fixed Kirk with a stare. "Say, Earth, perhaps?"

"Captain, is that Mr. Spock's voice?" The security guard's voice came over the intercom.

"Yes, he's in the sickbay." Kirk spoke without taking his eyes off the creature. "Have a security team report here on the double."

"Still trying to prove you're in command here, Kirk? You're not as smart as your clever Vulcan thinks."

Kirk caught the reference to Spock in the present tense.

"I will soon be able to influence your minds so totally that you will exhibit the actual physical manifestations of my delusions. For instance," he sat heavily in the chair, drumming his fingers on the table before him, "if I were to think of you as asphyxiating, your throat would constrict and you would actually die, Kirk. It would be a delusion no longer."

The fingers continued to drum out a pattern on the table top. Kirk kept his eyes fixed on the creature's face as he leaned back in his chair, one leg jacked up over the knee of the other in a posture Kirk had never seen him use before. He seemed to feel totally in control, believed himself to be invulnerable to attack and he sat relaxed and comfortable, boasting of his growing power. The fingers continued to tap out a rhythm on the desk, the creature oblivious to the sound. Kirk stood before him, listening to his words with part of his mind while the other searched desperately for any clue in the disjointed words or behavior that might help them. The restless tapping continued. Kirk listened to the sound and his mind began centering on the fingers and the pattern of the drumming the nails were making on the polished surface of the table. The pattern became discernable, a common Starfleet signal code, little used any more, similar to the Morse code of Old Earth. He could feel his heart begin to race as he read the words repeated over and over. The deep voice continued to speak but his mind was filled with the message that Spock, somewhere in the depths of the madman's mind, had managed to send to him. Then, snapping his mind back to the figure before him, he closed the words within his thoughts before the creature read them, grateful for the blindness of his insanity. It had proven and would ultimately prove to be their only weapon with which to fight him. The creature did indeed have the power of which he was now boasting, but his unstable mind had created weaknesses in the chain, gaps which prevented him from using his power over others in a constructive and orderly pattern. It was a weakness that they could use, must use, to defeat him and now Spock had given him a way.

The creature fixed him with a curious expression. "Kirk, you're not listening to me."

"Yes, I was. I was just thinking about Spock."

The creature rose to his feet and walked towards the door. "He's dead. Forget him." He turned around and spread his feet, mocking them with his stance, "And remember this. If you try to kill his body, I will simply take over someone else. It is a simple matter for me to do that. There is such a tempting variety of types on board your vessel, Kirk. Who should I choose? Who knows." He smiled again. "Perhaps I shall choose you." Then he laughed and left the room.

The security guard stood tensely in the hallway. Spock gave them an unconcerned look and walked up the hall, the three men trailing ineffectually behind him.

McCoy stood at the doorway, watching him walk away. "Do you think he meant that, about Spock being dead?"

Kirk shook his head. "No."

McCoy ran his fingers through his hair. "I could hardly stand to listen to him brag about his power. And that infernal tapping. I felt like telling him to stop but I didn't want to aggravate him. In his unstable condition, who knows what he would have done."

"Infrared radiation."

McCoy turned back to him, his fingers still in his hair. "What?"

"Infrared radiation. That's how we kill him. That was what Spock was saying in code, the same words over and over."

"What code? What are you talking about?"

"That tapping. It was in Starfleet's old Barani signal code. It was Spock, telling us how to kill the alien."

Kirk walked to the Sickbay door through which the creature had just left and stood, leaning his arm against it, his chin pressing into his wrist. For a moment, he was lost in thought.

McCoy came up to stand behind him. "We could rig up a chamber in the labs, bombard it with radiation."

"What will that do to Spock?"

"The higher the level of radiation, the hotter it will get inside the chamber. Spock's body can tolerate it up to 165 degrees."

Kirk continued to stare into the wall. "How long will it take for the temperature to get that high?"

McCoy thought for a moment. "Eight-ten minutes. I'd have to check it out. But I don't like it. What if the creature doesn't die in that time. What if Spock is wrong?"

Kirk's lips were drawn in a tight line. "He's a scientist. He knows the odds. He wouldn't have told us if he didn't think that he could survive the exposure."

"It would mean sacrificing his life to save the ship, Captain."

"It hasn't come to that yet. Spock still maintains some control. The creature admitted it to us himself. Spock wouldn't have given up this quickly. We both know Spock too well to believe that he would throw his life away without a struggle. He obviously has some knowledge of the creature's weaknesses. We have to assume that he also knows how much radiation will be needed and believes his body can tolerate the heat it will produce. We'll have to trust him on this, Bones. Do it."

McCoy looked at Kirk for a long moment, knowing how much this was costing the Captain. "Yes, Sir. I'll arrange for the chamber to be set up in the labs. We'll have to hurry. Spock can't hold out indefinitely and once whatever control he is exerting is gone, we'll have no hope at all."

"Jim, how are you going to get him in the chamber?"

Kirk shook his head. "I don't know Bones." He turned and began to walk quickly from the room. Then he hesitated and turned to face the doctor again. "Bones?"

"I'll do my best, Jim."

Kirk nodded slowly. Then he took a deep breath. "I'll be in the labs."

James Kirk stood outside of the lab, conferring with one of the security guards when the creature appeared from out of nowhere.

"Hatching plans for my destruction, no doubt. Why do you keep trying. I can't be killed, you know. You can kill the body, but I will survive it." He laughed. "I can trade from one to another forever, Kirk. Just think of what I'll be like in a thousand years. I'll destroy everything."

The thought seemed to delight him and, to Kirk's amazement, he turned and walked into the lab, stopping before the open door of the chamber.

Following him, Kirk suddenly understood. Spock was doing this, subtly directing his steps to the place of his own execution. He felt his throat tighten and he took a deep breath.

The creature turned to face the chamber. "What's this." Then understanding dawned in his eyes and he backed away.

Kirk, seeing their one chance disappearing before his eyes, drove him staggering into the cubicle with one massive shove to the shoulder. The creature fell on his side and looked up to see the door slam shut. Hearing the pressurized seal locking home, he scrambled to his feet and ran to the door, throwing his full weight against it. The fortified door held easily against his Vulcan strength, but in his rage, he continued to crash against it until the arm of his tunic was stained with blood.

"Kirk, you son of a bitch! I'll kill you!" He screamed the words into the bloodless face that looked back at him through the reinforced window.

"No." Kirk shook his head. "I will kill you."

The creature stopped, frozen in mid-motion at the words. "Then you kill him too."

"No. He's stronger than you are."

The walls began to grow hotter as the radiation grew in intensity. The creature's eyes widened with fear as he began sensing the effects of the radiation, feeling the infrared wavelengths as they began slicing through the electrical impulses of his mind. "No!" He pounded his fists on the door. His expression grew wild as he realized that they knew of his vulnerability. He searched the bare walls frantically. There was no way out and no way he could escape from the room. The walls were shimmering with heat waves now and he knew that he couldn't pass his consciousness through the radiated surfaces and survive.

Standing in the center of the room, he raised his fists up and began pounding his face. "How did you know?" Then realization dawned on him. "*He told you. He told you.*" The heat made him stagger and he stopped speaking for a moment.

His eyes never leaving the dying form, Kirk spoke to the others, his voice sharp. "No one is to look at the monitors. Do not believe what you see or hear."

McCoy stood nearest the radiation gauge. He knew that the dial had been preset and frozen just as he knew that, if he looked at it now, it would tell him something else. He could feel the creature's consciousness, frantic and obvious now, trying to influence his actions but he steeled his mind and ignored it.

The temperature in the sealed cubicle was now 160 degrees and the creature staggered from one baked wall to another. His arms swung in a crazy arc before him. His eyes were fixed on Kirk. "I'll take him with me, Kirk. I'll live longer than his miserable body limit. I'll survive him by one second, Kirk, one second! I'll take him to hell with me! Do you hear!" He swayed and fell heavily to one side, his body covered with sweat, his eyes glazed. The breathing was deep and the throat raw from inhaling the torrid air.

"How long has it been, Doctor?"

"Eight minutes."

Eight minutes. Eight years. Die, you filthy beast.

"It's 165 degrees in there now." McCoy's eyes were locked on the gauges before him. His voice was wavering so violently that he was difficult to understand. He closed his eyes, but his vision of the body dying a few feet away would not be shut out.

Suddenly, the form in the room shook and seemed to struggle for breath. The creature's hands clutched at his chest as he doubled over and fell forward. He lay on his side, his hands pressed against his ribs, trying vainly to protect the heart that was failing.

After a moment, Spock slowly raised his eyes to meet Kirk's and the look was one the Captain recognized. The lips moved. No sound came out, but Kirk was able to see the shape of the word. "Open the door!"

Scotty ran to his side. "Captain, are you sure? He could be influencing your mind."

Kirk turned to him, his eyes blazing. "I said open the door!"

The latch separated and he pulled the door open. The blast of hot air that hit him almost knocked him off his feet, but he stayed up and reached for Spock, pulling him from the room. The dark eyes rose to meet his for an instant and a gentle smile touched the mouth. Then the eyes closed and the head fell back against his arm.

McCoy was already directing the sickbay personnel to lift Spock onto the gurney. Knowing what to expect, McCoy had the hypo preset and, pulling up the tunic to be assured of his aim, he injected the stimulant directly into the Vulcan's heart.

"Let's go!" He motioned to the others and they carried the gurney at a run down the corridor.

The ship had never seemed so large to Kirk as he followed them winding through the hallways and down the turbolift.

"No respiration, no pulse." a nurse called out breathlessly

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, they reached the Sickbay. The door swung open and, without breaking stride, they ran to the far room and slid the gurney to a stop before the diagnostic bed. The two nurses on the far side expertly put their arms under Spock's shoulders and knees and slid him over. The panel was activated. The arrows at the baseline did not move.

"Cardiac stimulator!" The tool was in McCoy's hands before the echo of his words died out. He pressed it against the heart, his eyes darting back and forth from his work to the panel. Nothing.

"Give him 2 cc's of cordrazine."

The hiss of the hypo was clearly discernable and Kirk felt himself surprised at how quiet the Sickbay could be with so much activity going on.

And still the panel did not move.

McCoy raised the power of the stimulator to a higher level. His eyes searched the panel for any reading.

"Damn you, Spock. Don't you die on me. I won't let you die on me, do you hear!"

On impulse, he handed the cardiostimulator to M'Benga and moved to the head of the bed, taking Spock's face in his hands and turning his head so that he was looking directly into the sightless eyes.

"Spock, I know you can hear me, Spock. Somewhere in that stubborn mind of yours, I know I can always get through. You're not going to die, do you hear me. We've beaten that thing. It's gone and you're not going to let it defeat you now, not now when we're so close." He looked up at the panel. Nothing.

Kirk stood pressed against the far wall, his arms clasped before his chest as if he were trying to embrace himself, give himself the comfort that no one else could supply.

"One more cc of cordrazine." McCoy spoke without looking away from the lifeless form before him. "Spock!" He shook the Vulcan's body. "I know you, Spock. You've always got something in reserve, held back. Find that strength now and hold on. Spock, you miserable Vulcan, hold on!"

Kirk turned away and pressed his face against the wall.

And then the sound broke the silence. The steady throb of the panel as the arrows began to rise. McCoy watched in partial disbelief.

"Heart action restored, Doctor McCoy." M'Benga pulled the respirator away. "He's breathing on his own."

"McCoy nodded his head. "Good." His voice was shaky. He looked up at the readings and watched as they continued to climb. Then his eyes sought out Kirk, who stood leaning against the wall. The Captain's eyes were closed for the moment and McCoy waited for them to open again. When they did, he smiled at his friend. "Damn Vulcan is indestructible."

Kirk lay on his bed, quietly dictating his report to Starfleet Command, detailing the incidents that had taken place on Lesath II. Scanners had shown no evidence of any additional life forms on the planet, but Kirk still recommended that the planet and the entire system be given a wide berth. If the madman's unknown countrymen had used this system as a dumping grounds for their incurably insane, perhaps they would use it again. He wanted to be sure that no one else would ever have to experience what they had just gone through.

Finishing the report, he leaned forward and lay his head on his folded arms. He felt as if he hadn't slept for a week. He'd spent more time in the Sickbay during the last two days than everywhere else on the ship combined, but he had known that if he returned to his quarters, he would not be able to sleep.

He smiled to himself at the memory of an hour ago when McCoy, exasperated by his continual hovering around Spock's bed, had chased him from the Sickbay, threatening to sedate him with tranquilizers if that was what it took to get him to sleep. After exacting an unnecessary promise from the Doctor to call him if there were any change, 'any change at all,' Kirk had dutifully gone back to his room and fell, face down on the bed, knowing that his body needed the sleep, willing himself to rest. He wasn't even sure if he had fallen asleep but the sound of an emergency signal from the Sickbay rang in his head and his hand was on the intercom before his eyes were fully opened.

"Bones, what is it?"

"What, Captain?"

"I thought I heard an alarm."

He could almost see McCoy smile over the intercom. "He's fine, Captain. You couldn't hear the alarm anyway from your quarters. You're too far away."

Kirk rubbed his hand over his eyes. "Yeah, I guess you're right. Sorry. But be sure..."

"Yes, Captain. I will keep you informed. Never fear. Now go to sleep."

"Goodnight, Doctor."

Ten minutes later he thought he heard the alarm again but restrained himself from paging the Sickbay. The ship suddenly seemed full of strange, ominous sounds and, after his third false alarm, he gave up and went back to face McCoy.

The Doctor was standing near the door when he came in. "Well, Captain. You lasted about ten minutes longer than I expected." He smiled in his best fatherly fashion. "Would you like to sleep here? I just happen to have a bed available."

Kirk smiled sheepishly. "Thanks, Bones. I might have better luck here."

McCoy ushered him in and the bed, ready as promised, stood next to Spock's. Kirk looked at it for a moment. "You're sure it's all right for me to stay?"

McCoy patted him on the shoulder. "Yes, Captain. Just don't wake him up with your infernal snoring."

Kirk laughed, watching the Doctor leave the room, then moved to climb onto the empty bed. He pulled the covers up to his chin, but his eyes stayed open and he lay there for a long time, watching Spock sleep.

Later, McCoy came in to check the scanners and he frowned when he saw the Captain still awake.

Kirk smiled into that craggy face. "It gives me emotional security to watch him breathe."

The hours passed and Kirk finally fell asleep. McCoy's duty shift was over, but he stayed in the sickbay through the night anyway and when the faint alarm signalled him, he was on his feet and at Spock's side within five seconds.

He readjusted the medication while he waited patiently for the Vulcan to regain consciousness. Then, slowly, as if the effort took all of his strength, Spock opened his eyes and McCoy found himself looking into those soft brown pupils that he remembered.

He leaned over him. "Spock, you're in the Sickbay. You're going to be all right. I don't want you to try to move."

He frowned when Spock, with typical Vulcan stubbornness, almost immediately lifted his head and turned it to one side where his eyes fell on the sleeping form of his friend.

Kirk lay on his side, one arm dangling over the side of the bed, the other pillowing his cheek. He was snoring softly in his sleep. Spock continued to look at him with an unfathomable expression on his face.

"He couldn't sleep in his quarters." McCoy's voice broke the silence. "He made such a pest of himself that I finally told him to sleep here."

Spock turned back to look at him. "He said it gave him emotional security to watch you breathe." He and Spock looked at one another for a moment. Then McCoy dropped his gaze and studied the scanner in his hand. "You know, Mr. Spock, in all of my life, no one has ever loved me the way he loves you." He looked up at Spock again and there were tears in his eyes.

The sound of McCoy's voice penetrated into Kirk's sleep and he awoke with a jolt. Blinking his eyes, he looked over to see Spock turn his head to look at him.

Throwing the blanket aside, he was on his feet and at Spock's side in one step. He wrapped his fingers around one of the Vulcan's hands.

"He's as weak as a kitten, Jim. Take it easy."

"Take it easy! Kirk almost laughed. "How do you feel?"

"Tired." The word seemed to take forever to say and Kirk put his fingers to Spock's lips. "No, it's all right. You don't have to talk. Just lie still and conserve your strength."

He reached his hand out and gently touched Spock's face, tracing the shape of an eyebrow with one finger. The lump in his throat threatened to strangle him.

"Jim?" Spock's voice was soft and Kirk leaned forward in order to hear him more clearly.

"I am sorry that I hurt you."

Kirk could see the pain in his eyes and knew immediately what he meant. His fingers continued to brush along the eyebrow. "No, don't think about that."

"I should have fought harder."

Kirk shook his head, his eyes never leaving the Vulcan's face. "No, no. You did your best. We couldn't have defeated him without you."

Spock shifted his fingers to grip Kirk's hand. "Don't you understand. He sensed my... feelings for you. That was why he singled you out." Spock closed his eyes and turned his face away. "I am sorry. I tried to block them out but the emotions were too strong."

Kirk reached out and turned his face back to him. "You stopped him. You had the strength to fight back."

"That time. But he would have tried it again and he would have succeeded the next time."

Kirk searched his face. "Did you think you *would* die in the radiation chamber?"

Spock didn't answer. He tried to turn away again, but Kirk held him, his hands gentle, but firm along the side of Spock's face.

"Spock, it's over now. Let's put it behind us."

Spock looked up at him and some of the suffering faded from his eyes.

McCoy, who had been standing beside the Captain during the exchange, suddenly felt out of place and began to back out of the room. Spock and Kirk both turned to look at him as he started to leave.

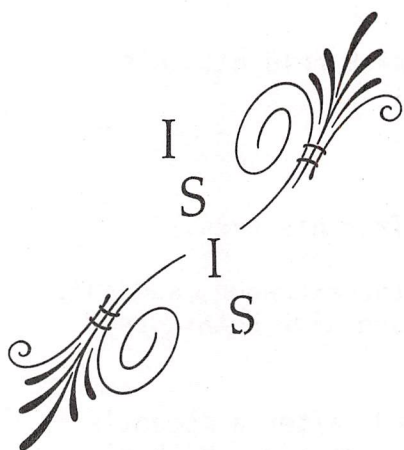
"Bones, don't go." Kirk reached his hand out to him, and, after a moment's hesitation, McCoy walked back and interlaced the fingers with his own. With his other hand, he reached out and covered Spock's limp fingers, feeling as they faintly stirred in response.

Suddenly embarrassed, he felt like fleeing the room, but, reluctant to break the circle, he looked up at Kirk. The Captain smiled back at him. Then McCoy looked at Spock and saw that the Vulcan was smiling at him. Smiling! That blasted Vulcan was lying there smiling at him.



Answer To Word Search





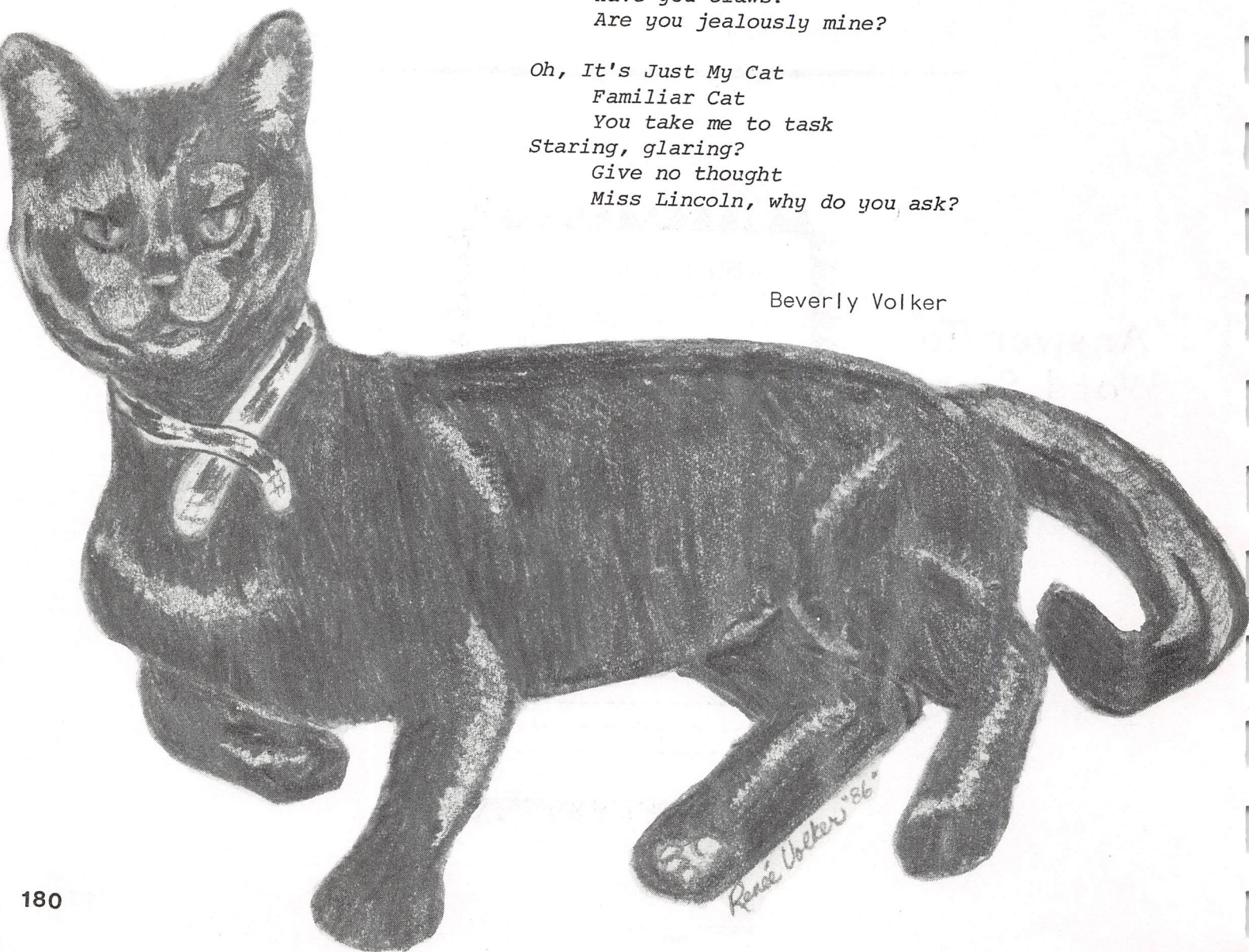
Oh, Beautiful Cat
Lovely Cat
So softly you purr
Lounging, stretching
On my couch
I stroke your silken fur

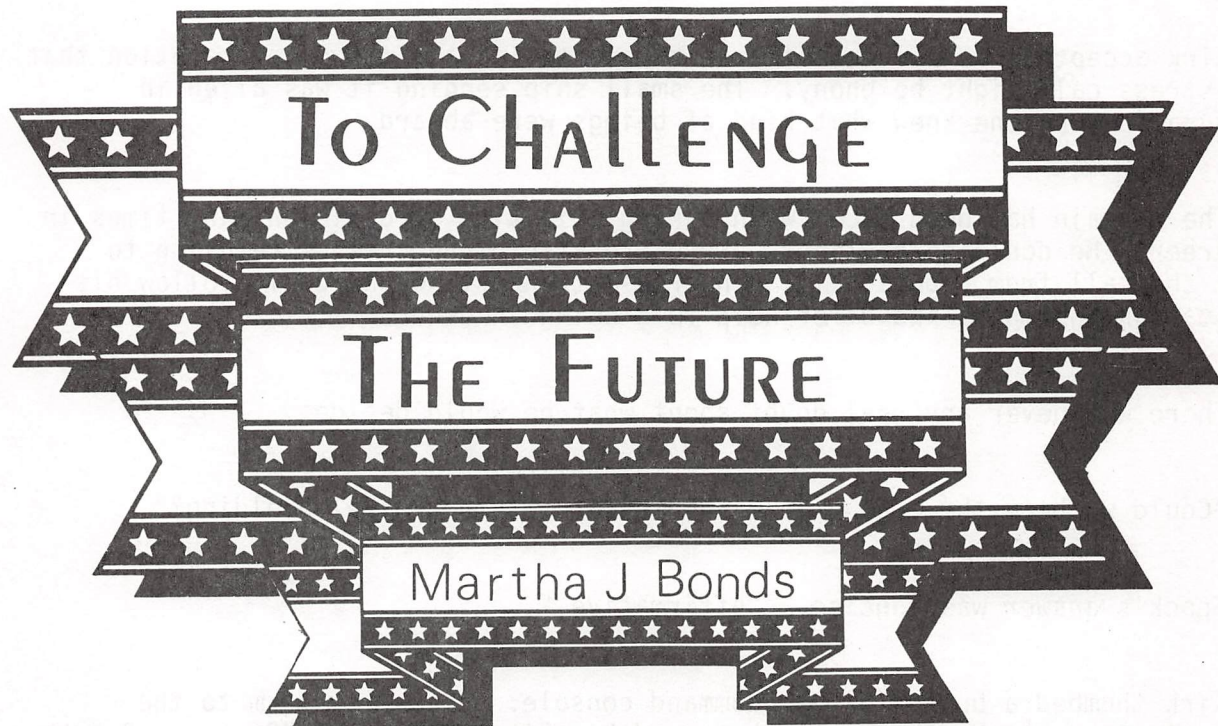
Oh, Ebony Cat
Midnight Cat
Jewels befit you well
Queenly, stately
Graceful moves
No secrets will you tell

Oh, Mystery Cat
Magic Cat
Companion through time
Womanly, female
Have you claws?
Are you jealously mine?

Oh, It's Just My Cat
Familiar Cat
You take me to task
Staring, glaring?
Give no thought
Miss Lincoln, why do you ask?

Beverly Volker





James Kirk stepped onto the bridge of the Enterprise, his eyes immediately going to the viewscreen.

"That's the ship, Captain." Sulu's voice carried a hint of excitement and curiosity.

"Are they still sending the distress call?" Kirk turned to Uhura.

"Yes, sir." She switched on the audio and a soft, earnest voice filled the bridge.

"S.O.S. Please help. Please. Spaceship in distress. Emergency."

"We can't make contact," Uhura informed the Captain. "She keeps broadcasting, but doesn't seem able to receive and her signal is getting weaker."

Kirk nodded, then turned his attention to the science station. "Spock?"

"I've been scanning the craft, Captain. It carries some kind of shielding. There may - or may not - be a malfunction aboard." Spock stressed the 'may not'.

Kirk accepted his science officer's information and the interpretation that the distress call might be phony. The small ship sending it was alien in configuration; no one knew what kind of beings were aboard.

The Captain had been faced with making this kind of decision many times in his career. He could be cautious, protect his ship and crew by refusing to answer the call from a potentially dangerous stranger. Or he could follow his humanitarian instincts and offer help to a being in need.

There was never any real doubt about what he would decide.

"Could we beam the crew of the ship aboard, through the shielding?"

Spock's answer was concise. "Affirmative."

Kirk thumbed a button on his command console. "Security team to the transporter room." He threw a look toward his First Officer. "Come on, Spock. Let's go welcome our visitors."

The Vulcan didn't even raise an eyebrow at his commanding officer's behavior. Kirk smiled, knowing Spock approved of his choice despite the danger that implementing it might cause.

In the transporter room, the security team stood ready. Spock and Scotty were making last minute adjustments with the delicate transporter sensors. The doors to the room whooshed open to admit a harried-looking Doctor McCoy. He was carrying a medical tricorder.

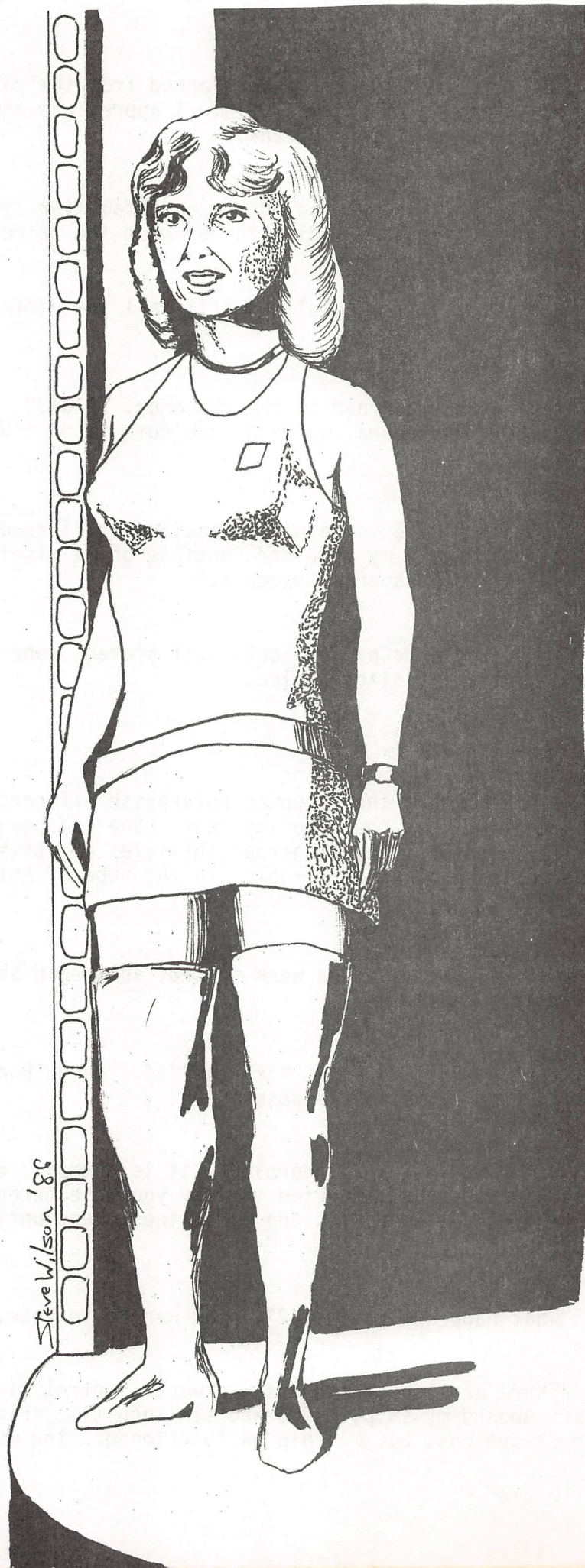
"Jim," I hope these beings are humanoid," he said as soon as he crossed the threshold. "You're taking quite a chance beaming them aboard this way."

"I know. But the ship has been sending that S.O.S. for two hours now and has made no threatening moves." Kirk looked to Spock and Mr. Scott. Their answering glances told him that all was in readiness. "Beam them aboard."

The form of only one being coalesced out of the sparkles forming on the transporter pad; young, blonde, definitely female.

Kirk looked at McCoy. McCoy looked back. He extended his tricorder and Kirk spoke up.

"I am Captain James Kirk. You're aboard the Starship Enterprise."



The expression of confusion cleared from the pale face. The figure turned, extending a hand. "Hello, Captain. I appreciate the rescue. I'm Addreaha Demar. You may call me Addreaha."

"Adreaha?" Kirk hesitated on the unfamiliar syllables. He glanced back at McCoy, looking for some indication of what the tricorder was telling him.

"Humanoid, Jim. I can't identify all the differences, but I'm registering extreme age."

Kirk's look returned to the newcomer. "Age?" She looked to be no more than twenty. "Addreaha, where do you come from? What were you doing in this area of space?"

"Captain." The voice was impassioned. "I need your help desperately. You must help me repair my ship and continue on my mission. The fate of all those on my planet depends on my success."

Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Scott just stared, none of them quite knowing what to make of their visitor's plea.

An hour later, the group of Enterprise officers faced Addreaha around a conference table in the briefing room. She had been examined in Sickbay and did not seem to possess any dangerous abilities or attitudes. All she wanted to do, she said, was explain her problem in the hope of enlisting the help of the Enterprise.

When all the officers were seated, she began speaking, "What do you know of time travel, gentlemen?"

After a short silence, Kirk replied, "We've had a few...experiences. Travelling through time is possible."

"On my world," said Addreaha, "it is common. We are time travellers, moving through that dimension the way you move through space. We have always been careful not to affect the time lines. And until recently, we have been successful."

"What happened recently?" Spock wanted to know.

"There are those among us who would control time for their own selfish needs. Aboard my ship, there are six such time criminals. I was taking them to their executions, but my ship malfunctioned. You must help me, for if they

live, they could escape and continue to disturb time lines throughout the galaxy."

The men of the Enterprise sat in stunned silence. Before they could question Addreaha's claim, she continued.

"There are other things depending on the completion of my mission. More lives will be lost if I am prevented from taking the criminals to their just punishments. Lives from the past and on through to the present...."

"There's no need to speak in riddles," Kirk told her. "If you wish us to help you we need concrete information. Execution is not the standard accepted form of punishment in our Federation."

Addreaha's expression had turned sad while she had been speaking, as if the lives in danger had personal significance to her. Now, she became business-like again.

"If you and your officers would come aboard my ship, you will see that I am being truthful. All the information I need to prove my story is there." She paused, smiling slightly. "You beamed me to the Enterprise so quickly that I had no time to pack my belongings."

Kirk smiled back. He was intrigued and knew he was being swayed by the woman's charm. She had made no threatening moves. If their mission was to make peaceful contact with other beings and help those in need, then they could at least offer to assist her in repairing her craft.

He knew both Spock and McCoy would counsel caution, though. "Is there a way we could probe your ship from here first?" he asked Addreaha.

"Caution is always prudent." She turned to Spock. "If you can adjust your sensors to screen for tri-metalicate, you will be able to read through my shielding."

A long eyebrow raised. "Tri-metalicate, indeed." Kirk knew that the rare substance was being tested by Starfleet in their attempts to invent cloaking devices for their starships.

Addreaha was smiling, looking as if she had learned many secrets in her travels. Kirk decided not to cloud the issue by asking whether her people had developed their own shielding from tri-metalicate or if they had found it in their travels through the future.

A short time later, Addreaha Demar escorted the Captain, First Officer and Chief Engineer of the Enterprise through the corridors of her ship. Their scans had shown no weapons, no reason to suspect a trap. Even the passengers she had described as criminals were no threat, since they were sleeping in suspended animation. The only crew was Addreaha herself.

Finishing the tour, they returned to the ship's bridge. Addreaha took a seat at her command console and directed her attention to her guests.

"Will you help me, Captain Kirk? I don't have much time." She smiled at the reference. You see, even though we travel through time we must also obey its rules and limitations. If I do not get underway in a very short time, I will not accomplish my mission."

"I don't understand, Miss Demar," Spock interjected. "You are on your way to execute prisoners, yet you say other lives are dependant on your completing the task. Are you speaking figuratively or literally?"

"Literally, Mr. Spock. If I do not get my prisoners to their fate at the appointed time, I will not arrive at my secondary destination in order to affect an important rescue."

"Couldn't you go on the rescue first, then take care of the prisoners?" asked Scotty.

Again the enigmatic smile came to Addreaha's lips. "Both destinations are in separate time lines."

Spock and Scotty set about repairing the ship. Addreaha directed them, showing where the malfunctions caused the problem in the time-warp drive as well as a difficulty with her transporters. They were able to repair the maneuverability of the ship, but after an hour, concluded that the transport beams could not be fixed with the materials and expertise at their disposal.

Spock looked into the face of the alien woman. She was brooding, reviewing the schematics for her transporters over and over again, as if trying to find a way to repair them. Yet, there was no way.

Addreaha sighed. "I wish I could order you to fix the transporters, Mr. Scott," she said, sounding vexed but half-amused.

Spock caught the look the chief engineer gave him, understanding its meaning. He almost smiled, recognizing that very often his own Captain did that very thing. He seemed capable of achieving the impossible just by ordering

Scotty to 'make it work'.

"I will never understand Humans," Spock said softly.

Addreaha laughed lightly, the sound reminding Spock of the bells Vulcan children rang on their birthday morning. "My father used to say that," she told Spock.

"He did? May I ask, Ms Demar, did he have a Human wife?" She gave him a questioning look. "My own mother is Human," he said in explanation.

Addreaha nodded knowingly. "My mother is as well, Mr. Spock. It seems we have much in common."

Before they could pursue the subject of parentage any further, Captain Kirk entered the ship's engine room to ask about their progress on the repairs.

Reminded of their difficulty, Addreaha's face fell. "I'm afraid we have been unsuccessful, Captain. Though the ship is maneuverable the transporters cannot be repaired. I can accomplish neither of my missions without them."

"I was just about to suggest she put in at Starbase 15," Scotty spoke up. "They have the most advanced transporter system in the quadrant,"

"I told you, I can't take any longer!" Addreaha seemed to be running out of patience. "Captain - you must help me!"

"I believe we have done everything we can, Ms Demar. If Scotty and Spock can't fix something, it can't be fixed."

She stood, coming to look directly into Kirk's eyes. "You have transporters aboard the Enterprise."

"Yes...."

"Then accompany me on my mission! The transporters in your ship could do what mine cannot...."

"Ms Demar," Kirk stated reasonably, "we are on a mission where time is of the essence too. We must deliver medical supplies to Rigel 4, where they are urgently needed." He paused, and Addreaha broke in, her voice imploring.

"How many lives will be lost if you do not accomplish your mission? Captain, are you prepared to bargain life for life, civilization for civilization?"

"That is not the way we do things in Starfleet."

Spock rose and crossed to stand at his Captain's side, feeling that the emotional currents in the engine room were about to go into overload. He sensed danger in the impending confrontation. The unknown factor was the lengths to which Addreaha Demar would go to pursue her success.

"Ms Demar, you must be reasonable," Kirk was saying. "You cannot expect us to take your word that thousands would die...."

"I did not say thousands would die. Thousands will never be born! My entire civilization as I know it will never come to exist. 'I' will not live." She attempted to calm herself. "Captain, I do not make this request lightly."

"I am sure you don't." Kirk met Spock's eyes. Trying to reason with the alien woman was not working. Spock felt inadequate to help Kirk solve the problem.

"Tell me, Captain Kirk," Addreaha asked suddenly, "this Rigel 4 - what manner of beings populate it?"

"Humans - why?" Kirk answered, the hesitancy of suspicion in his voice. "Rigel was one of the first planets colonized when Earth reached out into space."

"Captain, I cannot say with absolute certainty, but even the Rigel colony, perhaps even your Starfleet itself will be affected if I do not accomplish my mission. I am a Time Traveller. Are you willing to risk moving one pebble on a beach in the hope that your reality will not be changed?"

Spock understood what Addreaha was saying. Stop her from completing her mission, and a chain reaction through time could cause ripples throughout the galaxy.

"I am willing to do anything to convince you I am telling the truth," she continued. "I am not simply a madwoman trying to save her own life. I am trying to save all my people throughout time."

"Spock," Kirk turned to the Vulcan. "Could you attempt a mindmeld?"

"I believe it would prove effective, Captain." Spock nodded. "Ms Demar is half-human."

She readily agreed with the meld. Spock looked into her frantic eyes, willing them, through his own strength, to calm. He lifted a hand to touch her face and the force of her intellect merged with his like a storm cloud blowing in from the sea.

They were swirling together through the eye of a tornado, seeing time like a whirlwind. Each century lasted no more than a moment, each world spun around every other, all beings and creatures co-existing in the space of the one timeless funnel.

Spock saw glimmers of his own past, events he had helped to take place, deaths he had witnessed so that others may live. They had had their share of time travel experiences.

Jim said that and it's true. We know how easy it is to change everything through the shifting of one grain of sand.

Then you know I speak the truth.

She opened herself to him and her honesty was as wide and deep as the time streams swirling around them.

Show me your mission, Spock told her.

Her knowledge spun out, weaving a curtain around them to screen out the distortions of other times and other worlds. What Spock saw froze him with doubt. He knew what Kirk would say, that she could be devious, trying to control others' destinies, ruin instead of save.

She felt his dilemma and revealed more and more of his past, her present. her true self to him. It was expressed in colors, delicate shades of blue-sky, and deep passionate greens and reds of living things and earth. It was spun out of the gold of sunshine and children's laughter, the crystal droplets of winter snowstorms and children's tears.

Spock shivered, feeling the cold of winter and dread. He was feeling swallowed up by the funnel of time....

"Spock! Spock...."

Strong fingers caught him. He registered their pressure on his biceps and the emotion of concern they transmitted. Spock opened his eyes to find Kirk holding him, a worried frown on his face.

"Jim...she must succeed," Spock whispered. Sudden fatigue assaulted him and he collapsed against the solid comfort of his Captain's chest.

"Entering Earth orbit, Captain," Sulu reported.

Kirk sat forward in the command chair. The trip back in time had gone so fast, he had barely had time to seat himself after giving the order. Scotty and Spock had linked Addreaha's ship with the Enterprise; it was as if two great throbbing engines were working as one, as if two beings had melded to succeed in a single purpose.

When Spock had told him that Addreaha's mission was to Earth's past, he had felt a sense of *deja' vu*. He had taken a chance with Earth's history before. In one instance, he had had to trust himself, in another a stranger. Gary Seven was not unlike Addreaha Demar. Kirk hoped he had judged her character as well as he had Gary Seven's.

The woman's voice came over the bridge intercom. "Entering the late 1960's...go to forward scanners. Lock transporters on my ship's telemetry."

Kirk nodded to his First Officer, who activated the correct controls. In the transporter room, Mr. Scott was ready to beam down the prisoners. Their suspended animation was scheduled to end at the moment of beaming.

"Captain," Uhura said in a hushed voice. "I'm picking up old television broadcasts." She keyed a switch on her control panel and the forward screen lit up with a view from hell.

Men were running, their feet tangled in jungle underbrush. They wore uniforms, carried guns....

"The Viet Nam War," Spock said quietly. "It was shown, every night in news broadcasts."

"Unbelievable," Chekov muttered.

"She intends to beam her prisoners down in that?" Sulu sounded shocked as they witnessed two soldiers killed in a deadly pit, booby-trapped with pointed sticks by the enemy.

Addreaha's voice, calm and authoritative came over the speaker. "Prepare to transport. Now."

Kirk moved to stand at Spock's station, to monitor the transporter room with his friend. Their eyes registered the problem at the same moment Scott's voice called up to the bridge.

"Malfunction. Something prevented beaming them. The sensors had trouble reading through the suspended animation suits!" Scotty sounded breathless and with his next words, his voice rose to a shout.

"Security! Security! They're waking up!"

Kirk gave his order on the run and he caught a glimpse of Uhura summoning the security team as he and Spock dashed into the turbolift.

The prisoners' fight was brief but disastrous. The ship had lost its precise timing and the moment when the six could have met their fate passed.

Addreaha stood in the center of the transporter room with Kirk and Spock. Her prisoners were under the guard of six burly Enterprise security men.

"You see, Captain," she was explaining, "they escalated a war in which they had no right to meddle, after learning in a trip to the future, that the planet they favored would lose. Their sentence was to die in war, where their bodies could not be identified. They would have been taken to be among the hundreds of unknown American soldiers in that war."

Kirk spared a glance at the prisoners. One might even be taken as the enemy in that war; his looks were as Asian as those of Sulu. There was one female among them and of the remaining four, one male was black.

"Are you certain their bodies would be unidentifiable?" Kirk asked.

"Yes. The one function my transporter retained, and which was linked to yours with the help of Mr. Scott and Mr. Spock is the molecular change factor. The prisoners would be adapted in the act of beaming to appear to belong in the time and place they were sent. We chose times and locations, of course, where their physical types already could be perceived as a match, as you can see."

Kirk shook his head, the details didn't matter so much, if the mission Addreaha had brought them on was in jeopardy. "What can we do to help you now, Addreaha? Can you save the lives you came to rescue?"

She took a long moment before answering. "I don't know. We hoped to beam up a number of beings who would otherwise be killed in a space accident. But, I

don't know. Perhaps the beaming will not work...."

Kirk gave her a steady look. "We've come this far. We'll try."

Addreaha went up to the bridge with Kirk and Spock. Scotty stayed behind in the transporter room with the team guarding the prisoners.

Addreaha stood beside the command chair, her hands twisting in front of her in a nervous clasp. Her tension seemed to have reached a point of acute distress. She had been emotional before, but Kirk now saw that her reactions were becoming more personal, the closer they got to attempting her plan.

As if noticing the look Kirk gave her, she turned to him, her smile wry and sad. "It is difficult," she began slowly, "not to feel keenly the fear that I will fail."

"You have a personal interest in this mission, don't you, Addreaha?" he asked, his eyes watching every nuance of her expression.

At last she sighed. "Yes. My life depends on my success. I've come from my own past to rescue my mother."

Kirk swallowed. The paradoxes of time travel had always intrigued him. "If you are planning to rescue your own mother, don't you know how your future will turn out?"

"No. Absolutely not. That is why I am so worried. We may not see the future - we would be tempted to influence it."

"Coming up on the designated time now, Captain." Sulu's voice broke into the conversation. "Mid-nineteen eighties. Northern hemisphere, southern United States."

"Good. Slow it down, Sulu. We need very precise timing here," Kirk directed.

Spock bent over his scanners, monitoring the ship's progress through space and time.

Addreaha joined him at the science station. As Kirk watched, she gave Spock instructions, asked questions and made minor adjustments.

Kirk was becoming nervous himself. "Is there anything more you can tell me about your objective? Perhaps if we all know the specifics."

"I have told you I must intercept a space vehicle. The passengers aboard are very valuable." Addreaha broke off suddenly, bending to look into the scanner.

"Our timing -" she gasped. "Seconds are important...your ship gives mine so much power."

"Cut power, Sulu," Kirk ordered.

"The disaster," Addreaha cried. "It is already beginning. No time - "

With a wild cry, she bolted to the turbolift. Kirk charged after her and dived into the lift as the doors closed.

"I must...change the plans," Addreaha was breathless. "We can't just take them. We must leave...bodies."

"I don't understand."

"The prisoners - they can take the place of those we must rescue."

The doors opened and Kirk and the woman hurried down the corridor to the transporter. Inside the room, Addreaha took over for Scotty.

"There are seven." She said it in a dead voice. "My prisoners are but six."

"Addreaha, what - ?" Kirk grasped her arm as she moved to stand on the pads along with the six convicted criminals."

"Captain, my thanks." There were tears in Addreaha's eyes. "I had hoped to meet my mother, take her home to our past to meet my father and give birth to me. But I see that my fate consists of going in her place. I don't know if we will be successful - if she is beamed up alive, I will never know." She paused, drawing a breath."

"Will you escort them to their new homes on my world, Captain Kirk?"

"We would be honored."

Addreaha signaled the transporter chief and this time the well-guarded prisoners made no trouble. She stood with them dissolving away into sparkles with tears of bravery and sacrifice welling in her eyes.

On Earth, millions watched as a ship carrying seven astronauts exploded seconds into the launch. Children cried for their fathers, for the mother who would never return, for the teacher they loved.

On the Enterprise, seven beamed up coughing from the smoke contaminated air, dazed and hurt from the force of the explosion, but all alive. Kirk had no trouble recognizing Addreaha's mother among them. He reached to shake her hand as McCoy hurried in with his medical gear.

"I'm Captain James T. Kirk," he said, presenting calm to the confused woman.

"I'm Christa, the teacher in space."





ALTERNATIVES

Bones told you once that you were more afraid of living
Than you were of dying
And putting a stop
To days of constant giving;

Giving your mind, your soul, your heart
(I know you've one, my friend)
To thankless millions who'll never know.
It doesn't seem to end.

But we've learned that life is like that,
Oh so gruelingly real.
It makes me see your planet's way,
So much easier not to feel.

We never stop believing in happy endings.
We set our hopes too high
To hide the truth, the morbid truth:
It's easier just to die.

To die -- like this world, my son, my ship,
Just happy memories now.
How I long to join them all
And take my final bow.

Their endings, like those of mythic lovers,
Have perfect symmetry.
How simple just to end the tale,
I die for you and you for me.

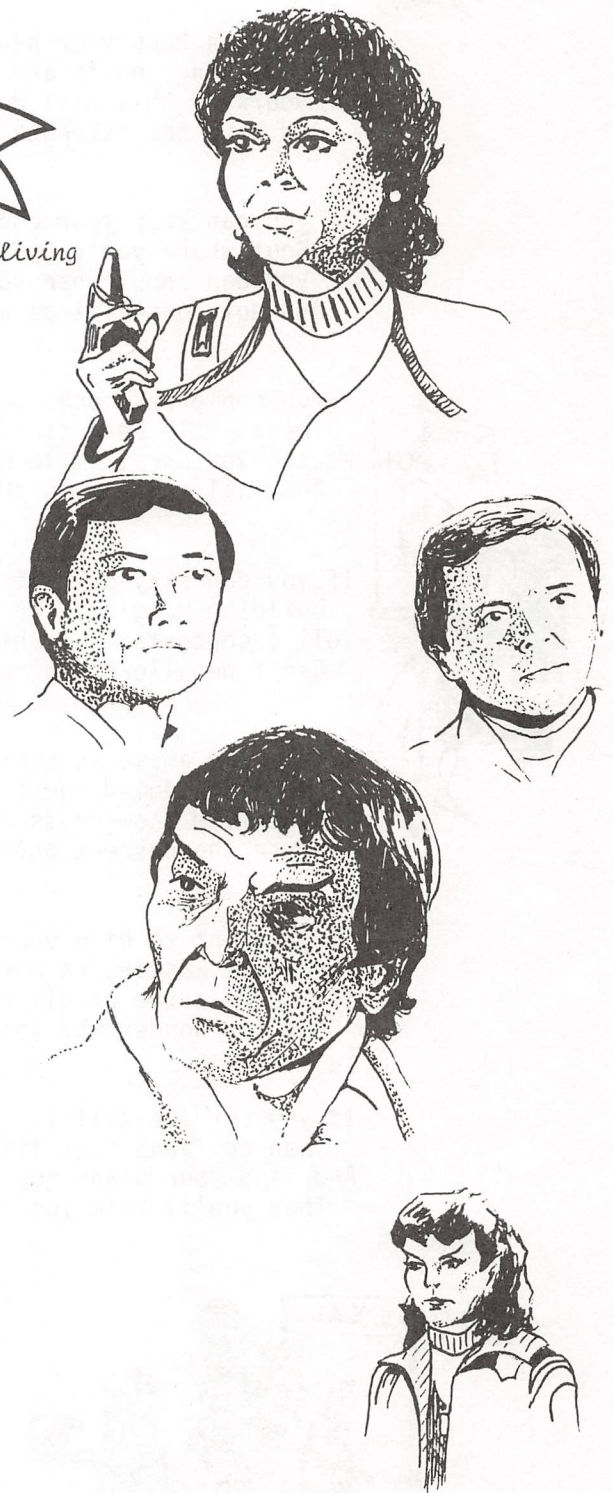
It's oh so very neat and clean
To end while love is strong
And never try to look beyond
That final, moving song.

There are no happy endings, Spock,
So perfect and profound.
One day ends in perfect joy,
But morning still comes around.

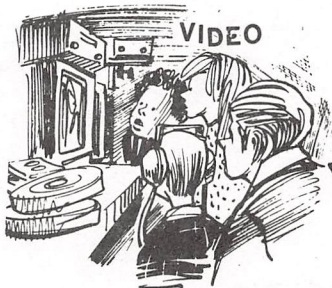
Dawn makes the ending muddled,
The poignant theme less clear.
It's easier to stop as love begins,
Harder to face next year.

Our friends have pledge their lives to you;
They'll die to help once more.
They chose the easy job, my friend,
They quit and closed the door.

Still, they are the truest friends,
They have so much to give
For each of them, I'd gladly die,
But for you, my friend, I'll live.



Steve Wilson '86



'IF' For The Committee



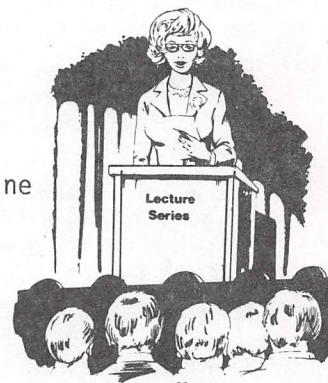
If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you
If you know this will work when others doubt you
And have the strength to last the three days through

If you can keep your cool with dealers wailing
'Bout where you've placed them in the huckster room
If you can shout when speaker's mikes are failing
And not forsee it as a hint of doom



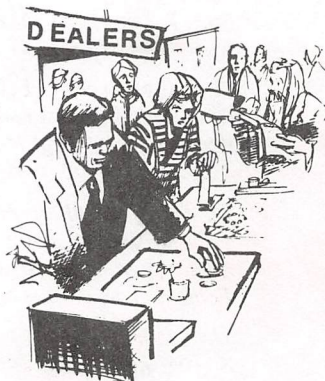
If you can greet each registrant complaining
Impatiently been standing there since nine
At ten you open, smile while you're explaining
That all this while they've stood in the wrong line

If you can stay up half the night preceeding
Building hangings for the art display
Tell a contestant why his fifteen-minute reading
Can't be allowed in costume call that way



If you can amuse an audience that's waiting
For a scheduled guest who's nowhere to be seen
If the film show needs a constant change updating
Cause the current ones keep tangling the machine

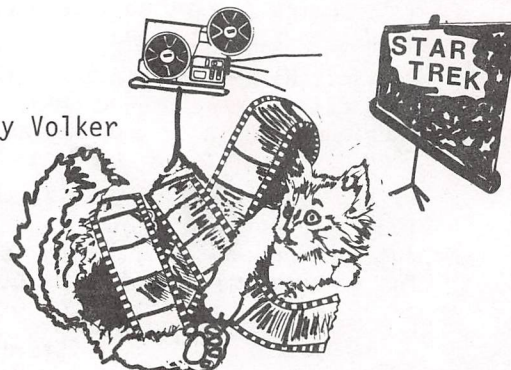
If you want to hide your badge that says 'committee'
And not answer one more question on the run
If you're tired of giving directions about the city
And you wonder why you **thought** this would be fun



If you survive till the last attendee's departed
Then collapse just like a dead dog at the end
And find your plans for next year already started
Then you'll know you've run a con, my friend.



Beverly Volker





Steve Wilson '86